

KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

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KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

BASUDHA CHAKRAVARTY



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FOREWORD

THIS COUNTRY has produced remarkable 'personalities in every walk of life since the earliest times. Our history is crowded with names of outstanding persons who have made notable contribution in art, literature, politics, science or other fields. Some are household names. There are many whose names are familiar but about whose life and work little is known to the public. There are others about whom people know little but who have made remarkable achievements.

The history of a country is, to a great extent, the history of its great men and women. They have moulded it and built it up. It is essential for the ordinary citizen to know something about these personalities in order to understand how our country has evolved.

For this purpose several countries have published Dictionaries of National Biography. It is unfortunate that we have no such comprehensive work available in India. The intention of this series is not to present such a scholarly and comprehensive book but rather to present to the ordinary reader, in a simple and narrative form, the life of eminent men and women of the country from the earliest days. It is intended to make it a popular encyclopaedia of national biography in separate volumes.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the rebel poet of Bengal is an outstanding personality of our times. A remarkable poet and patriot, Kazi Nazrul Islam suffered a great deal during India's struggle for freedom. Out of this suffering

was born a poetry which has immortalised both the poet and the causes dear to his heart. I am grateful to Shri Basudha Chakravarty to have written this biography with sympathy and understanding.

I am also grateful to Prof. K. Swaminathan and Shri Mahendra V. Desai for accepting the editorship of this Series.

New Delhi
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B. V. KESKAR

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I. BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY was drawing to a close. India had already experienced the first stirrings of political awakening. Bengal, in a few years' time, was to be engulfed by a movement which, though immediately aiming at annulment of the partition imposed on the province by the British government in 1905, spontaneously projected itself into a sustained struggle for national freedom. The seeds had already been sown by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Ananda Math* and other historical works which harked back to the people's tradition of struggle for liberty. The soul-stirring song *Bande Mataram* was itself a great force that moved the people's hearts. Swami Vivekananda and, before him, Rammohan Roy had bequeathed to the people a social perspective which was activist to a degree and quickened the minds of the people to a heightened awareness of their national existence. These and other factors of the Renaissance in India were awaiting fulfilment when Kazi Nazrul Islam was born on Jaistha 11 of the Bengali year 1306, corresponding to May 24, 1899, at village Churulia in Burdwan district of what is now West Bengal.

Nazrul was the second of three brothers and one sister. As the appellation "Kazi" shows, he was born in a family of hereditary Muslim judges which might be presumed to have been reasonably well off, being in possession of a *jagir* granted by the Mughal rulers. The family is believed to have originally migrated from Patna. There is every evidence that Nazrul's father Kazi Patel Mohammad, had been reduced to penury. Nazrul lost his

father when he was only fifteen years old and had to do odd jobs to earn for the family's subsistence. He had earlier passed the Lower Primary examination from the village *maktab* and had also worked as a teacher there. He then worked successively as a composer of songs for the village folk-song party, a domestic servant at the quarters of a railway guard and a hired help at a bread shop. Destiny did not permit him at that period to go to school, and all he learnt in his childhood was to read the Quran by means of symbols and a little Persian from Kazi Bazle Karim, an uncle by relation. But he had already made a mark composing songs, plays and playlets for village troupes and had learnt also to play the indigenous drum. It was while he was working at the bread shop that his musical talents attracted the notice of Kazi Rafizullah, a police officer posted at the locality. This gentleman took him to his own district Mymensingh in what is now Eastern Pakistan, and got him admitted into a high school at village Darirampur. Nazrul, however, did not stay long at that school but returned to Burdwan and took his admission into the Nabin Chandra Institution at Mathrun where Kumud Ranjan Mallik, a well-known poet, was one of his teachers. Soon, again, he transferred himself to Searsole Raj High School where his schooling was facilitated by a free studentship and free lodging at the Muslim hostel paid for by the local landlord, who also made him a monthly allowance of seven rupees. He was the top boy of his class and obtained double promotion from Class VIII to Class X. At this school he came under the influence of Nibaran Chandra Ghatak, a teacher who was connected with the revolutionary Jugantar Party and whose aunt Dukuribala Debi

was the first woman in Bengal to suffer imprisonment under the Arms Act. Nazrul has owned to the deep impression left on him by Nibaran Chandra Ghatak and it was from a patriotic motive—that military training would some day come useful in the fight for the country's liberation — that he enlisted in the Bengali Double Company, subsequently known as the 49th Bengali Regiment. This regiment had been formed during the First World War in response to a public demand for an opportunity for Bengali youths for military service and was based at Karachi. Nazrul could have had no other motive for leaving school where he held the top place in his class and so had every incentive for continuing his studies. Political and personal influences now took a definite hand in determining the course of his life. He was then barely eighteen years of age.

But Nazrul Islam had been born in the lap of the Muses. His first poem, sent from Karachi, was published in the *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika* (Bengali Muslim Literary Magazine) in its issue of Sravan, 1325 by the Bengali calendar, corresponding to July-August, 1919. This was the organ of the Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Samiti which had been formed by Muslim writers because they had felt they were not taken seriously at the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Bengali Literary Academy), of which also they were members. They, however, disclaimed communal motivation for a separate organization. The Assistant Secretary of the Samity was Mr. Muzaffar Ahmed who has since risen to be a top-ranking communist leader. Mr. Ahmed had to do all the managerial work for the journal and has stated in his voluminous *Kazi Nazrul Islam : Memoirs* (in Bengali) that Nazrul's first

published poem was originally entitled *Kshama* (Pardon); but the editors changed it to *Mukti* (Release) as more appropriate and Nazrul in a letter to Mr. Ahmed approved the change. The poem purported to be based on the true story of a faqir who had his hands tied up and who secured release from earthly life in an extraordinary manner and was happy about it. The poem has been regarded by many as showing that Nazrul had a spiritual bent of mind even in his boyhood. He is known to have tended earlier the grave a faqir named Haji Pahalwan : to sweep it clean and to light an oil lamp over it in the evening. He was also said to have loved to serve hemp to sadhus and sannyasis. All these point to the spiritual bent of his mind which, in due course, matured into love of Yoga and initiation into Yogic exercises. He followed up *Mukti* with stories among which was *Byathar Dan*—(the Gift of Sorrow), a moving tale in which main characters are shown as having joined the Red Army. This is believed to have been based on the fact that some Indian soldiers and politicals did join the Red Army at the time. But the story breathes intense patriotism as well. In the beginning of 1920 Nazrul took the opportunity of a seven-day leave to come to Calcutta and visit the office of the journal. Nazrul at this time published two other poems: one in *Saogat*, also a Muslim-edited monthly and a translation of a few lines from Hafiz in *Prabasi*, the leading Bengali monthly of the day edited by late Mr. Ramnanda Chatterjee, which had also the privilege of publishing new poems by Rabindranath Tagore. Nazrul had learnt Persian from Hafiz Nurunnabi, his teacher at Searsole Raj High School and a writer, and then from a moulvi attached to his regiment. That enabled him to

undertake extensive translations from Persian later in life.

The 49th Bengal Regiment was disbanded in March, 1920 and Nazrul returned to Calcutta. He first stayed with his boyhood friend Sailajananda Mukherjee, who at that time had just started on a brilliant career as a writer of fiction, but soon removed to the office of *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika* where Mr. Muzaffar Ahmed was also staying. As an ex-serviceman Nazrul had every chance of getting a Government job and he applied for the post of a sub-registrar; but when called for an interview, he was persuaded by his friends to forego the opportunity because they thought that he should, in view of his literary potentialities, stay in Calcutta. Nazrul decided accordingly and the most fruitful chapter of his literary career began. He was at this time twenty-one years of age.

II. THE POET-REBEL ARRIVES

HAVILDAR KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM, as he had come to be called, soon emerged as a prolific writer. Poems, songs, ballads, stories and essays of the belles-lettres type poured from his pen in rapid succession. *Moslem Bharat*, a monthly first published by Muslim writers in April, 1920, was at this time the chief vehicle of publication of Nazrul's writings though he wrote for several other journals as well. The editor of *Moslem Bharat* was Mr. Mozammel Huq, a poet hailing from Santipur, a far-famed town in Nadia district. The *de facto* editor, however, was his son Mr. Afzalul Huq who was also a publisher. Nazrul's first contribution to *Moslem Bharat* was *Baadhan Hara* (Unrestrained), a novel in the form of letters. Among his contributions to *Moslem Bharat* in the first year were some outstanding poems: *Shatil Arab*, an ode to the river of that name, *Moharram*, *Korbani*, *Fatiha Doazdaham*, *Badal Prater Sharab* (Wine for a Rainy Morning), an allegory entitled *Badal Barishane* (While it Rained) and other poems and songs. Special mention should be made of a poem entitled *Kheya Parer Tarani* (Ferry Boat), a wonderful combination of sublimity with resonant rhyme. Nazrul is known to have received inspiration for writing this poem from a painting of a boat by a lady of a distinguished family of Dacca. *Upasana* and *Saogat* were among the other monthlies for which Nazrul wrote at the time. But that was also the time when Nazrul took to political journalism. This was not surprising, considering that he had left school and joined the army also with the political motive of service to his country.

It was because he considered it his duty to use his talents in the political cause that, though fundamentally a writer of poems and songs, he readily lent himself to journalism at many periods of his career.

The year 1920, when he made his first debut in the line, was a period of intense stress and tension. The people's anger at the massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh and other atrocities in the Punjab in 1919 coupled with the deep resentment of the Muslims against the dissolution of the Caliphate and dismemberment of Turkey, as also discontent over the utter inadequacy of the Montagu-Chelmsford Constitutional Reforms introduced in 1919, led to the launching of the non-cooperation movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. A special session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta endorsed the movement and the country was in a state of ferment. It was on this background that Nazrul joined the Bengali evening daily *Naba-yug* (The New Era) founded by the well-known leader, the late Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq who was fundamentally a nationalist though, due to a certain emotional instability in his nature, he sometimes let himself be swayed by communal politics. Mr. Muzaffar Ahmed claims to have persuaded Mr. Huq to publish the paper and to have been responsible for all practical arrangements for its publication. Nazrul was the Chief editorial writer. His writings at the time were later collected in a book entitled *Yugabani* (Message of the Age); but the book was immediately proscribed by the Government. These were characterised by extreme political fervour relating not only to the current political struggle but also to the growing agitation by workers and peasants. The Government issued several warnings to

the paper and then forfeited the security of one thousand rupees furnished by the printers. The paper, as a result, got into difficulties and could continue publication only after depositing a fresh security of two thousand rupees. Mr. Fazlul Huq, however, came under the influence of certain political friends who favoured toning down the policy of the paper. In consequence, Nazrul left the paper, followed soon after by Mr. Ahmed. That was in December, 1921. Nazrul then left for a holiday at Deoghar in Santal Parganas district of Bihar.

While working for *Naba-yug* and though busy writing political editorials, Nazrul produced many remarkable poems. One of these was *Kamal Pasha* in honour of the architect of Turkey's resurgence. It was a period of new awakening in many countries which profoundly inspired Nazrul. It was also the period when the circle of his friends expanded rapidly and contemporary and even some senior writers were among his regular visitors. Some of them later cut themselves off from him in a manner that intrigued all who came to know of it. One of them, in particular, was the late Mohit Lal Majumdar, a poet and essayist of very considerable ability, who was quite enthusiastic over Nazrul's first published poems and, being considerably senior to him in years, took him, as it were, under his wings but subsequently became aloof and even hostile to the extent of addressing pungent attacks in verse on him. Nazrul, however, took it all in his stride and remained friendly with most of his contemporary writers. He had high regard for another senior poet of the time, Satyendranath Dutt. Satyendranath was called a master of rhyme and was the first Bengali poet to compose poems on social equality and the

struggle of the working class. Nazrul addressed poems to Dutt both during the latter's lifetime and after his premature death. Even when there was misunderstanding with anyone Nazrul, everybody conceded, bore him no rancour or ill-will. His popularity among his contemporaries was immense.

After his return from Deoghar Nazrul, for a brief while, joined *Nabayug* again. But due to a change of policy the paper's popularity had declined and the Government too brought pressure upon it to dispense with Nazrul's services. At this period Nazrul was subjected to an experience which had a convulsive effect upon him. A marriage proposal, to which he had heartily committed himself, turned out to be a trick. That was a profound shock, but it was followed by an efflorescence of his poetic genius in a prolific output of poems. The Non-cooperation movement was on and Nazrul celebrated the epochal arrival of Mahatma Gandhi :

Who is this mad traveller that has rushed into the yard
of the prison where the mother is immured in chains ?

Thirty crores of my brethren sing the death-defying
song and march with him.

Who is he that has arrived to sever the shackle of
sorrow of the subject country ?

Who is he that sounds the conch of liberation on the
heart of the altar of the goddess of chains ?

Sad and aggrieved brothers carry the dead body of
their mother and, crying their hearts out, bring her
back from the other side of death.

Now they have all sworn : 'We shall never again go to the aliens' door'.

For salvation lies in one's own being, not in beggarly solicitation.

The triumphal drum of eternal truth resounds throughout the world; untruth dies today of its own poison, its death won't be long delayed. Not as grumblers but as steadfast men come ye, for time flies ! They are afraid to die; to how many is it given to die as one should die ?

The doomsday horn of Israfil¹ sounds today in the wild wind's trumpet from north-west—it sounds, not in the tune of a great dissolution, but to awaken the country in *Bhairavi*²! Crush beneath your feet the barricades in your path and the snare of loves: crush them underfoot and come along!

Why these tears ? Today it is time to make a new augury. Sound the trumpet, fly the flag and come along.

There were many other poems and songs of like nature. *Maran-baran* (welcome to Death) ran thus :

Come, come along, O death !

Take away fear from these man of the nature of sheep, afraid of death! Let your feet, ponderous with destruction, dance in fierce, terrible, resonant harmony over the hearts of those who, even before step-

¹ Raphael, the angel of Doomsday.

² A mode in Indian music, a morning melody.

ping out on the street, are afraid of the street and, even before death, die in the darkness of a bolted room !

Play the flute of life in the vivacious raga Deepak !
Let fire smile even in the mouths of the dead !

There lives no man worth the name where scars left on the shoulders and backs of men by chains and shoes, cry out : 'It is a great sin to live in places like that'.

Let your curse light the torch at the cremation ground, let there be new creation, let the country get a new name.

Let the rod of punishment in your hands shake up the world of slaves, the home of slaves. Make the dead body your bed, O Shiva, and make it known that you are there !

Strike the earth that is full of dead souls ! May you alone live. Amidst all that is ended you are endless. We welcome you. Says the old man of wisdom : 'Life is an illusion ! Destroy the shadow of the lifeless body of that coward ! You, death the liberator ! Come on as the nor'-wester ! Take away those who have died before their deaths. You are life, you are creation in this country of the decrepit and the dead.

That's why the useless chains call for your shaft that removes Death.

The burden of another song was :

Gandhi may be a prisoner but truth is not.

The rush of thousands of people to jail was an

unprecedented phenomenon.

Nazrul's *Ovation to the Prisoner* began thus :

What's this I hear at this red dawn of night : I hear
the roar of liberation in the resounding chains of
prisoners : Who are they that smile the smile of
liberation in jail ?

The bounds of fear have dissolved in their free hearts.

The whole poem sounds like a resonant echo of
prisoners' march to freedom of their country.

Soon, in a number of poems and songs, Nazrul recorded
his response to the surging emotions of the time.
Song of the Spinning Wheel is one of these. The first
stanza sets the tune :

Resolve—

Revolve, oh revolve, my darling spinning-wheel !
Yonder I hear in the sound of your wheels the advent
of the chariot of Swaraj.

It seems all of us do hear in your whirling sound that
yonder the Lion's Gate of Swaraj opens, that there
won't be any more delay. The sun that is India's
destiny has rolled back, the sorrowful night is over.

But the national picture was not all idealism. Nazrul
was confronted with social hypocrisies and prejudices in
incidents within his personal experience. The result was
a crop of poems, one of the most famous of which was
called *Rascality of Easteism*.

This is all rascality in the name of caste : You caste impostors are playing this gamble : You say you will lose your caste if I touch you ? But caste is not a morsel of food in the hands of a child that it would get lost.

And so on. On a more sombre note Nazrul wrote *Satya-mantra*—the *Mantram* of Truth :

Let the injunctions in your books be burnt down : Let God's injunctions prevail.

The long poem ends thus :

Christ, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammad and Rama : they recognized what man was and what was his price; so they embraced in their hearts those whom men hated. Now Gandhi sings that song again : You are enemies of man; eyes your, alas, have not opened to that wisdom.

Let the injunction of the Great Dispenser prevail :
Let the injunction of the Great Dispenser prevail.

These poems along with a long religious piece *Fatiha Doaz-Daham* and another long poem *Storm* were collected in a book named *Bisher Banshi* (the Flute of Poison) which was proscribed by the Government. Nazrul at this time wrote also many lyric pieces inspired by sentiment for those dear and near to him.

Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das had in the meantime published a group of journals including a Bengali daily called *Banglar Katha*. At the request of Basanti Devi,

Deshbandhu's wife, Nazrul wrote for the paper a remarkable poem which could also be sung. It is entitled *Bhangar Gan* (the Song of Destruction) :

“Break open that iron-gates of the prison ! Reduce to shambles the stone-altar, thick with blood, made for worship of fetters ! Hark, you the young herald of the north-east gales : Blow your trumpet of the Day of Doom !

Let the flag of nemesis fly over the wall on the East. Play the music of the mad barn-stormers known as *Gajan* :

Who is master ? Who is King ? Who is it that punishes free, unfettered truth ? Hah ! Hah ! Hah !

Will God Himself wear a noose round His neck ? The very thought makes one laugh. Who is it that teaches mean, ruinous stuff like that ?

You madcaps who are beside yourself, Give the prisons a powerful, sudden, cataclysmic shake. Utter the great cry—the cry of Haider of Arabian legend. Take the resounding drum over your shoulders, call, oh call death to life. There dances the nor'-wester, will you just sit and while away time ? May I see you shake the foundation of the terrible prison. Kick it hard, break the lock ! Set all prisons on fire : set them on fire : topple, uproot them all.

This poem formed the first piece in a book of poems of the same name, published later on and promptly proscribed. But Nazrul's creative flow never stopped.

The crowning moment of his poetic career had come earlier, in the cold weather of 1921, when he wrote the long and virile poem *Bidrohi* (the Rebel) which at once established him as a major poet. *Bidrohi* was given to *Moslem Bharat* for publication but *Bijoli*, edited by Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the famous revolutionary and brother of Aurobindo Ghosh, obtained a copy and, the publication of *Moslem Bharat* being delayed, published it earlier though with acknowledgement to *Moslem Bharat*. The poem caused an unprecedented sensation but also an adverse reaction among some of his literary contemporaries—particularly Mohit Lal Majumdar who accused him of copying ideas from a prose piece he had written earlier. But influence of ideas is a very intangible thing, and critics have noted the influence of Nazrul in some of Mohit Lal's later poems. So if there was any influence of Mohit Lal on Nazrul, it must have been spontaneous and all in the manner of inter-communication. Yet a weekly of that period, *Shanibarar Chithi* (Saturday Letter) made it its business to publish parodies of Nazrul's poems and songs and personal attacks upon him. Its editor, Sajani Kanto Das, also an able poet and critic, nevertheless later claimed friendship with Nazrul. Notwithstanding these criticisms and attacks, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, among others, welcomed the new poet into the literary firmament of Bengal.

Now firmly established in his literary career, Nazrul avowed his active interest in politics and associated himself with political journalism. He assisted Mr. Muzaffar Ahmed in his efforts to publish another daily. They secured the help of Mr. Qutbuddin Ahmed, Manager of Moulana Abul Kalam Azad's famous Urdu papers

Al Hilal and *Al Balag*, but failed to act up to the latter's advice to publish a weekly to begin with. Instead, they floated a company with a view to publishing a daily but few shares could be sold and the plan had to be abandoned.

Nazrul's first book was published early in 1922. It was not a book of poems but of poetical prose in the form of stories. *Byathar Dan* (The Gift of Sorrow), the story which, as has been mentioned before, was published in *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika*, gave its name to the first book published. *Rikter Bedan* (Pains of the Wretched), also a book of stories, followed later. At this time Nazrul went for a fairly long stay at the district town of Comilla, now in Eastern Pakistan. It was there that he composed, among other poems, one named *Pralayollash* (Exaltation of a Cataclysm), on the upheaval caused by the Non-cooperation movement but claimed by some as referring to the Russian Revolution. Nazrul was called back from Comilla to write for the *Sevak* (The Servant), a Bengali daily run by Moulana Md. Akram Khan, a litterateur and Congress leader of those days who later went over to the Muslim League. It was while writing for *Sevak* that Nazrul planned and published a political weekly called *Dhumketu* (The Comet) the first number of which came out on August 12, 1922. The first number carried a benediction in poetry from Rabindranath which ran thus :

Come swiftly, comet, come. Build a bridge of fire over darkness : fly on the tower of these evil days your pennant of victory. Let the mark of misfortune be writ on the forehead of murky night.

Startle into wakefulness those who are still semi-conscious with your bold challenge.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee also sent a message in which he enjoined Nazrul to speak the truth irrespective of whether it was against a friend or an enemy. The paper's revolutionary fervour made a great impact on the educated middle class. Though singing praise of the Non-cooperation movement, Nazrul was never wedded to the creed of non-violence. His rebellious spirit steered clear of questions of violence and non-violence. The revolutionary movement had been suspended at this time to give non-cooperation a chance and the *Dhumketu* definitely helped to keep alive and nourish the revolutionary spirit. It was, therefore, hailed by the revolutionaries, some of whom actively associated themselves with it. *Dhumketu* was thus a hall-mark of Nazrul Islam's politico-literary career. It stood openly for complete independence from British rule and soon got into trouble with the Government. Nazrul was arrested for a poem named *Anandamayee Agamane* (On the Advent of the Goddess of Happiness) he published in one of the issues of the paper. The Goddess of Happiness is a popular appellation of the Goddess Durga whose annual worship in autumn is the greatest festival for Hindus in Bengal. The poem invoked the goddess to do away with the hypocrisy and cowardliness in her worship, to descend in a mad, cataclysmic dance and demand the blood of her sons to fulfil the objectives of the sacrifices of Siraj, Tipoo Sultan, Mir Kassim and the Rani of Jhansi. Nazrul was prosecuted for sedition : the charge mentioned also a short article by a girl-contributor. He was tried and sentenced to one

year's rigorous imprisonment. This was in January, 1923. Nazrul's defence on the occasion, remarkable for its solemnity and dignity, was published in a booklet called *Rajbandir Jabanbandi* (the Deposition of a State Prisoner). Rabindranath, at this time, dedicated to Nazrul a newly composed dance-drama called *Basant* which he also produced on the stage in Calcutta. Nazrul was entitled as a political prisoner to special treatment in jail but the Government transferred him to the district jail at Hooghly and reduced him to the rank of an ordinary prisoner. Nazrul undertook a hunger-strike in protest, with the result that there was great public concern over him. Requests to him to give up the hunger-strike included a telegraphic message from Tagore which was, however, not delivered to him. Nazrul finally acceded to the requests of his countrymen and the Government thought it prudent to restore his status as a special-class prisoner and transferred him to the district jail at Berhampore. He was released on the expiry of his term on December 15, 1923.

Nazrul's first book of poems, *Agni-Veena* (The Veena of Fire) had appeared in October, 1922. A collection of his editorials in *Nabayug* was published at the same time under the title *Yuga-bani* but was, as has been stated before, proscribed. While in jail Nazrul composed a number of romantic poems, most outstanding among which was *Pujarini* (The Woman Worshipper). These poems were smuggled out of jail and published in book form under the title *Dolan Champa* (The Swinging Champak flower). All these books were published by Arya Publishing House, who were also publishers of works by Shri Aurobindo. *Agni-Veena* was dedicated by a poem to Barindra Kumar

Ghosh. The master-artist Abanindra Nath Tagore painted the design for the cover of the book.

After his release from jail Nazrul visited the district town of Midnapore to attend the eleventh annual session of the local branch of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and was warmly received. In April, 1924 he married Pramila Sen Gupta, a cousin of one of his friends with whose family he had become intimate at Comilla. Though some people demurred to the inter-communal marriage, it did not affect Nazrul's popularity. Soon afterwards, however, he plunged into politics again and collaborated in founding what was at first called the Labour Swaraj Party of the Indian National Congress and subsequently the Workers' and Peasants' Party. As the name of the party shows, he was at this period drawn towards the masses unlike the period in *Dhumketu* which was imbued with middle-class revolutionism. He became the director of a new weekly called *Langal* (The Plough). The title-page of this weekly, too, carried a benedictory message in verse from Rabindranath Tagore :

Take up the plough, Balaram, bring the desert-breaking
plough. Bring strength and plenty and let vain wrangles
die.

He composed and published in *Langal* a compact series of poems called *Samyabadi* (Song of Equality). These beautiful poems breathed equality as between men and women, proclaimed revolt against citadels of orthodoxy, upheld the rights of the down-trodden, exposed the current de-humanization of religion, sang obeisance to the mother even within the fallen woman, the essential

humanity of the apparent sinner and, of course, the brotherhood of man. He wrote also *Krishaker Gan* (Song of the Peasant) for *Langal*. A remarkable poem named *Sabyasachi*, which is one of the names of Arjuna, appeared in the same paper.

At this time Nazrul was staying mostly at Hooghly. At this time he also met Mahatma Gandhi and sang, to the Mahatma's delight, the Song of the Spinning Wheel. He also composed a remarkable song on Mahatma's visit to Bengal.

Who are you that have arrived over the way on which we did not look for you? You have pushed open the door of Kangsha's prison¹ and come.

Shiva dances today in the burning ground of dead bodies: he dances with his feet making flowers blossom as they spread out in dance.

It was at Hooghly that he composed a number of remarkable songs and poems on the death of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. These were published in a book named *Chitta-nama*. Also at Hooghly, while seriously ill, he composed a long poem *Jhar* (The Storm) which was included in his book *Bisher Banshi* mentioned before. Nazrul, at this period, visited, on invitation, the village Ganga-jalghati in Bankura district where he opened the national school known as *Amar Kanan* after the name of a dedicated worker who had built it up with untiring labour.

¹ Kangsha, a tyrant in Hindu mythology, kept Krishna's parents confined in a dungeon so that no son of theirs, in fulfilment of an oracle, might overthrow and kill him.

He also composed a poem of that name. Then he attended Youth and Student Conferences at Bankura. He also visited the near-by town of Bishnupur where an old fort and a big cannon recall the former existence of an independent kingdom. Nazrul greeted these as symbols of independence. He stayed at Hooghly till the end of 1925. Then he went to Krishnagar, another district town not far from Calcutta, and stayed there for two years and a half. This period was full of hectic activity on his part. A number of conferences were held at Krishnagar at that time and in each of them Nazrul sang songs, composed by him, suitable for the occasion. The first was the All Bangal Praja Conference, in which he sang *Sramiker Gan* (Song of Labour). Being an active member of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, he organized the Volunteer Corps on the occasion of the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Krishnagar. It was at that conference he sang *Kandari Hushiar* (Helmsman, Beware) which has since taken its place in Bengal as a chorus song of unparalleled fervour. At the Student Conference he sang the *Song of Students* and at the Youth Conference a stirring song the first line of which said, "March, march, march." At Krishnagar Nazrul helped to found a night school for the working class. While there, he stood for election to the Central Legislative Assembly. But those were days of separate electorate and the Congress, which gave him nomination, was not serious about the contest. So it proved to be a misadventure. His stay there was also remarkable for great literary activity. Some among the large number of poems and songs he composed were satirical pieces on topics like communal pacts and dominion status. These were later published in a book entitled *Chandrabinidu*

(The Nasal Sign). But that book, too, was proscribed. At Krishnagar Nazrul wrote one of his best poems *Dauidrya* (Poverty), which was published in *Kallol* (Tidal Din), the chief organ of the post-Tagore literary movement. He came to be associated with the movement, being a frequent contributor to *Kallol* and other journals representing the movement, including *Kali Kalam* (Pen & Ink) of Calcutta and *Pragati* (Progress) of Dacca.

Nazrul also paid a very successful visit to Dacca. Another famous poem of his, *Sristisukher Ullashe* (In the Exaltation of Creative Happiness), was also published in *Kallol*. He did a translation of the Communist Internationale and published it in *Ganabani* which had replaced *Langal*. He composed at Krishnagar two novels, *Kuhelika* (Fog) and *Mrityu-Kshudha* (Hunger for Death). These depicted intense emotional conflict with revolutionary duty, and in them art was overwhelmed by emphasis on politics. The first part of *Kuhelika* as also a play called *Jhili-Mili* and another entitled *Setu-bandha* were published in *Naoroz*, a Bengali monthly published in 1927 by Benozir Ahmed, a poet engaged in terrorist activity, who had become something of a legend. The paper had only five months' existence.

Communal riots had broken out in Calcutta in 1926 and Nazrul reacted strongly in a number of articles published in *Ganabani* and poems later collected in the book *Phani-Manasha* (Thorny Cactus). The articles were later collected and published in a book called *Rudra Mangal* (To The Terrible God). Other books published in this period were poetical works *Chhayanat* (after the classical raga of that name), *Puber Howa* (The East Wind), *Samyabadi* in which the poems mentioned herebefore were

collected, *Sarbahara* (The Proletariat), *Jinjir* (Chains), and *Sandhya* (Evening). Nazrul's visits to the seaside at Chittagong and islands of Noakhali were productive of a number of superb poems of nature and love collected in *Sindhu-Hindol* (The Roll of the Sea) and *Chakrabak* (The Flamingo). Also published in this period were small books of essays—*Rudra Mangal*, which has been mentioned before, and *Durdiner Yatri* (The Pilgrim of Dark Days), the novel in the form of letters called *Badhan Hara* (already mentioned), the novel *Mrityu-Kshudha* (already mentioned), two books of poems for children *Jhinge Phool* (Flowers of the Ridge Gourd) and *Sat Bhai Champa* (Seven Champak Brothers), a book of playlets named *Jhili-Mili* (Shutters), another called *Putuler Biya* (The Doll's Wedding) for children, three books of songs, namely, *Bulbul* (The Nightingale) dedicated to Dilip Kumar Roy, the famous singer and writer, *Chokher Chatak* (The Swallow of the Eye), *Nazrul Gitika* (Songs by Nazrul) and also the first edition of an anthology of his poems under the title *Sanchita* (The Gathered), dedicated to Rabindranath.

A public reception was accorded to Nazrul in Calcutta in the middle of 1929, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, the eminent scientist, savant and social worker, presiding. A number of distinguished men were present and among the speakers was Subhas Chandra Bose who paid a remarkable tribute to Nazrul and his soul-stirring poems and songs.

Towards the end of the thirties, even when his son Bulbul lay seriously ill, Nazrul completed the translation from the original Persian of *Rubayat-i-Hafiz*. *Pralay-Sikha* (The Cataclysmic Flame) was another collection of

Nazrul's poems published about this time, one of the poems *Naba Bharater Haldi-Ghat* (Haldighat of New India) celebrating the epic battle which Jatindranath Mukherjee *alias* Bagha Jatin and his fellow-revolutionaries fought in 1916 with the British police at Balasore, Orissa and in which they laid down their lives. The book was proscribed. Nazrul was prosecuted and sentenced to six months' imprisonment but was set free in the jail delivery following the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement. This decade, then, was marked by tireless literary and political activity on the part of a poet who, almost alone among writers of contemporary Bengal, was proud to own his intense concern with politics so long as his country was not free.

III. IN THE FRAY

CONTEMPORARY WRITERS have noticed in their recollections the tremendous enthusiasm with which Nazrul Islam's political writings used to be received. This was particularly true of his articles in *Dhumketu*. Every week, on the day of publication of the paper, hundreds of people waited at street corners for the hawkers to come and there was a scramble for copies. Not many of these have been preserved. The British Government not only proscribed them but saw to it that they were destroyed. Only a few saved in private collections have survived. Contrary to expectations, his articles are not of the nature to create mere excitement. Passion certainly was there, but there is nothing to show that merely to inflame popular passions was the object of these writings. There was a grim seriousness of purpose, and reason found a big place. They show no unthinking acceptance of a viewpoint but examination of the pros and cons of every question and a conclusion reached through balanced judgment. An article setting the path *Dhumketu* intended to tread, emphasized that the paper would ask the people of the country to be strictly honest with themselves. "I must not," it says, "be tempted to get popular respect or praise by pretending to understand more than I actually do. That applies even to the views of Mahatma Gandhi or the great poet Rabindranath. I am a man only to the extent that I truly respond to the message of Rabindra, Aurobindo or Gandhi. If their messages do not arouse response in my heart, I cannot obey them." The article proceeds to say that much self-deception pre-

vails among the professed followers of the great leaders, hence they suffer from moral weakness. Many people joined the Non-violence movement without believing in it and hence had to retreat. Only those who are sincere with themselves, can achieve the country's liberation.

The article clearly drives home the point that the paper would refuse to ditto the current movement for non-violence. Nazrul Islam's reservations over non-violence are clear here. Another article disclaims the idea that the fight for freedom should be based on religion : "Slaves have no religion." Youths must give the first place to the fight for life and not be inhibited by religious injunctions.

Other articles give clarion calls for sacrifice of life, for pledging everything, including life, to the destruction of evil. Nazrul Islam recalls the immortal words in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Ananda Math* regarding self-dedication and places them in the current context. The style and vigour of his language worked sharply upon the people's minds. For young men and women they worked as catalysts to action.

An article on World Literature surveys the current trends in the writings of creative artists all over the world. He divides them into three classes : (1) the romantic writers, (2) writers who feel the sufferings of humanity but stop short of rebelling against them, and (3) writers like Gorky who call for and inspire action. Nazrul Islam's immediate preference is for the last-named but he bows also to those who only dreamt and meditated and created immortal literature.

Mai Bhukha Hoon (I am Hungry) : Nazrul portrays a mad woman whose eyes are full of tears, yet emit fire

and whose only cry is that she is hungry. Young men try to respond to her cry but are detained by their parents. But the cry proves irresistible and quite a number of people respond. They ask her if she wants food. There is no reply. They ask her if she wants clothes. But her only cry, now bitter, is that she is hungry. But then she is recognized—she is the Mother! The blood of young men boil, they realize that it is blood that the Mother demands. They give their blood and at dawn, the Mother is no longer a mad woman but the goddess who bestows kindness and smiles on her children. Those who gave their blood are not dead. They are the immortals. Some of them have their throats blue from the hangman's rope, the throats of others are red from the assassin's sword. Apparently symbolic of the sacrifice of revolutionary blood for the mother country, this article created a stir at the time. There was an exuberant article on Kamal Pasha matching Nazrul's famous poem on the same subject.

An exchange of letters between Mr Ibrahim Khan, a reputed educationist and writer, and Kazi Nazrul Islam is included in the collection and throws light on the efforts of orthodox Muslim circles to annex Nazrul to themselves, and Nazrul's reaction thereto. Mr. Khan claims great progressive significance for Islam and calls upon Nazrul to abandon the path of revolt and to try to recall the Muslim community to the Islamic way of life. He offered Nazrul a place comparable to that occupied by Jalaluddin Rumi in Persian life. Nazrul's reply was characteristic. While claiming to be loyal to the true spirit of Islam, he could not be confined within communal bounds. Nor did he believe that anything but shock treatment could arouse the Muslim community or his

countrymen. He was pledged to Hindu-Muslim unity and would work through his art to that end and for the liberation and uplift of his countrymen. From the path he thus set for himself he never deviated.

Another article *The Beautiful Mine* reveals Nazrul Islam's entire outlook on life as a quest of the Beautiful. Beautiful was his initiation into literary work. Beautiful was the love of his friends and countrymen. Beautiful was also his imprisonment; the dedication by Rabindranath of a lyric play to him had relieved the rigours of imprisonment and had converted it into a blessing. His travels throughout the province in response to calls from leaders to sing and speak to his countrymen had placed on him the mantle of his mother country's unstinted love. No difference of caste or religion had stood in the way of his acceptance by his countrymen. He perceived in that the presence of the Beautiful. Then came the Beautiful in the form of Grief : The death of his three year and eight month-old son who had been his constant companion and an image of himself. He sought for an explanation why it had happened thus. The Beautiful then lured him to Destruction but he needed strength for that and heard the call to meditate and to study Vedanta and the Quran. He felt uplifted, but also that it was incumbent on him to repay his debt to his country. That was a call to the battle for relief of the woes of the mother country—for removal of division and inequality from the face of the earth to make it beautiful. Thus the quest of the Beautiful unites his life as an artist with his life of action. Nazrul Islam said explicitly in prose what he indicated also in his poems.

Rudra-mangal begins with an article calling upon the

down-trodden masses to revolt. The next article *My Way* is a reminder that we must learn to depend upon ourselves and not rest content with the fact that Mahatma Gandhi is there. In fact, Gandhiji asked everybody to rely on his or her own strength. *Mother of Kshudiram*—Kshudiram Bose the nineteen-year-old boy who was the first in Bengal's revolutionary movement to give up his life on the gallows, refers to a very popular song which speaks of Kshudiram as saying, at the moment of his death, that he would be born again out of the womb of his mother's sister. Nazrul Islam puts it that every boy born since is Kshudiram reborn and calls upon their mothers to let go of their sons so that they can join the battle for freedom. *Mandir Musjid* refers to communal riots and is a long essay showing up the absurdity of killing hundreds of men for the sake of these brick-built seats of power. *Bishvani* (The Venomous Message) is a pungent attack on traitors to the country. *Hindu-Mussalman* refers to a discussion Nazrul had had with Gurdev Tagore and vividly portrays the de-humanization of man. Addresses collected in the book call upon Muslim youths to imbibe the modern currents of thought and to remove all barriers in the way of Hindus and Muslims through knowledge of each other's cultures. While Hindus had done a great job translating their ancient literature into the provincial languages, Muslims had yet to reclaim their scriptures and history from Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Nazrul Islam calls upon his audience to fulfil the task.

Even in the first phase of his political writings Nazrul called for unity between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Buddhists in a universal brotherhood. Articles he wrote for *Nabayug* and collected in *Yugabani* include one on

Dharmaghat (Strike)—the weapon the working class had already started using in defence of their rights. *The Scene in Calcutta Mourning the Death of Lokamanya Tilak* is a remarkable call for Hindus and Muslims uniting to achieve the objects of the departed leader. Articles against untouchability and invoking the latent strength of the so-called depressed classes are among other writings calculated to arouse all-round national effort. *Durdiner Yatri* (Pilgrim of Dark Days) is a collection of articles with deep emotional urges. In *Amra Lakshmi-Chharar Dal* (We are the Waifs and Strays of the World) Nazrul calls upon uprooted youths to go along with him to create with their lives a new world. Apart from their literary flourish and historical value, all these writings help one to recapture the idealism and self-abandon of the most stirring times of Bengal's recent history.

IV. SEEKING THE BEAUTIFUL

Sindhu Hindol, a book of poems by Nazrul Islam, begins with a poem in three parts addressed to the sea. The poet calls these parts Waves. Waves indeed they are in delineation of the rolling sorrow which meets the poet's eye in the surging waters. The agony, the unending quest, the ceaseless search for the unknown are, in the poet's imagination, directed to the Beautiful—the Grand Harmony of the Universe. When the moonlight illumines it, the sea dreams of the Beautiful and dances in waves of joy. But it wakes up again and the agonies return. The poet feels his own pains and those of the sea are the same :

Suffering from the same torment, the same pain,
You weep, I weep, my beloved weeps too

So the quest continues. In the second part the waves are the soldiers of the quest. Storms bow to the quest, clouds fleet along in tune with it, the fishes and animals of the sea fall in line. Deep down the oysters weave garlands of pearls and wait; red necklaces are woven by corals. The islands form waiting places of tryst for the beloved who is yet to come. The ships look like tamed pigeons as they go over the sea; the flying birds carry its dreams to the regions :

The weary boatman sings in the tune known as Bhatial. My life yearns to float far and then farther, from the unknown which knows no bounds The boatman sails, you sail, I sail too.

But suddenly the realisation comes that love does not make one weak, that its role is to make one sublime and great. So at flowtide the sea asserts itself, its agonies burst forth in foams. It looks as if all its pains are welling up on the beach. The poet finds himself similarly situated. It is time for him now to meet the sea face to face :

I have so much to talk to you,
so many songs to sing to you,
Oh sea, my friend, I have so much pain to convey to
you.

So he invites the sea to grow calm and, in great silence, sit face to face with him. But, at that moment, all words will cease :

There we shall dive into ourselves without speaking;
and if we must talk, we could speak only two words :
'You are separated from your beloved, so am I.'

But in the third part the pains of the sea reveal themselves in a great act of self-abnegation. The sea engulfs three-fourths of the earth but has thrown up one-fourth on to the land which is its daughter. The unrequited love of the sea protects the earth and fills her with abundance. The gods and the demons churned out the nectar from the sea which spends itself in enriching the earth. But its own agonies are never any less.

There's emptiness above, emptiness below, emptiness
all around :

In the midst of it all the waters of the sea weep.
Endless is the wail of its wretchedness.

But even in its tears the sea is beautiful. The poet

salutes the Beautiful :

“You are great ! You are ever pining for your beloved ! You the sea who are my friend, the rebel of my heart, my Beautiful !

I salute you ! Accept my salutation...

You weep, I weep, my beloved ever weeps :

I am destitute, you are destitute, it is empty space all around : amidst it all the sea-waters weep : endless is the wail of its desolation.”

But this quest in agony for the Beautiful is itself beset by the non-beautiful and has to confront it. The confrontation occurs in the last poem of the same book, *Dware Baje Jhanjhar Jinjir* :

The storm rattles its chains at the door.

Arise, O hero, open the door !

The summer sun hears the vigorous call of a sharp voice : Victory to the new march of Youth !

For “the Beautiful comes bathing in the rose-red lake of pain.” Who is the woman that

“on the white marble floor of the temple-altar, lies prostrate at the feet of the soulless god with her hair dishevelled, her clothes disarrayed—almost like the land-lily the leaves of which have been torn away ? I know it is her agonized prayer, O man of arms, that shines like a sword in your hand. The woman weeping all over the world does make obeisance to you, O hero, in the festival of death, in battle and in the chamber of tears.

For :

O Beautiful, we make your way far easy and simple.
We build up your future : we sing day and night in
our lively young voices of your advent : our thunder-
like voice utters the proud cry of victory !
We kindle the fire of discontent in people's hearts.

So

The god of revolution stands over you again; he has
come again and again, has brought the message of the
end of an era.

But we did not wake. Let us not fail this time .

The ugly enemy soldier has come along the secret
path at dead of night. He has struck sudden blows
from behind.

He has sprayed darkness over your well-lit path : he has
hurled stones of abuse and built mountains of them.
He has dug trenches of untruth on the way : he has
hypocritical moral advice writ over his eyes and face.
He and his tribe have screamed out of naked lust : they
have tried to blow off your light, O Sun.

Now the time is come .

How long shall we take to cross the waters of the
seven seas of the enchanting liar and reach the shores
of real happiness ?

O you the general of Revolution, you god of blood,
speak, speak out! You who are good and beautiful,
come down among the jackals of the burning ground

and give us the ultimate support that you can.

Give us strength, give us hope, give the supreme assurance you can give.

Open up that lac-house of the envious with its doors shut. Let all these doubts go : let the goddess of horizons sing the victory of youth in all directions. Let the ugly liar be defeated. Come, come, the Joyous and the Beautiful : You who are full of light, wake !

If one has to look for anything like Nazrul Islam's philosophy of life, it is here. The eternal quest of the Beautiful through pain and sorrow is projected along the road of revolt against the evil that stalks the world. The final blow for the removal of that evil must be struck here and now.

But the quest does not stop on that account. In the poem *Pujarini* (The Woman Worshipper) in *Dolan-Champa*, mentioned before, the poet is involved in a cycle of pain through which he recognizes love as not a begger but a worshipper. Thee motional whirlpool is almost intolerable Yet the poet goes through it and says that though the beloved leaves him :

The poet who has conquered death with your love and whose throat is blue with the poison he has drunk out of pain, is immortal and so he will ever remain.

In the poem *The Row of Arecanut Trees Flanking the Window* in *Chakrabak* the poet listens to the message of the beloved in the murmur of tree-leaves. In the silence of midnight he has found the trees standing by as friends. Now, as he departs, he sees the trees, rooted to the ground, in eternal wait, suffering from sun's rays and wet with

nightly dews and only occasionally bedecked in moonlight. Suffering from torments of love, he has a dialogue with them.

In *The Sea in Winter* in the same book the poet returns to the sea which now lies calm and forlorn. It is a very long poem in which his desolate mind finds refuge in the sea which no longer possesses the exuberance of the rains.

So Now You Have Forgotten Me is another very long poem reflecting all the wayward turns of the beloved's which finally lets him slip out of itself. The end is abdication.

You have been a touchstone, beautiful and hard. Your touch has made me beautiful.

But you could not know of it ! Let this, then, be the truth, my beloved. The row of lamps did light up but has been extinguished.

All the conflicting emotions, jealousy among them, come into play, but it is not really jealousy at all. Nazrul Islam has run the entire gamut of emotions and unfathoms all their reactions in the recesses of the human mind. Emotionally high-strung, he has given full vent to himself in poetry, but one feels that the experience drove him slowly into the mystic mood of love which, he admitted before he ceased speaking, he had attained and in which soon afterwards he got completely lost.

VI. IN TUNE WITH LIFE

RABINDRANATH TAGORE invited Nazrul Islam to stay at Santiniketan to teach songs to students there and himself learn music from Dinendranath Tagore, the poet's nephew, who set up the notations to Tagore's songs. Tagore did not like that Nazrul, being the creative artist that he was, should be pre-occupied with politics. But Nazrul saw it in a different light and the benediction that Tagore sent on the occasion of publication of *Dhumketu* was considered as a recognition of Nazrul's right to go his own way. There was no fundamental difference of outlook between Nazrul and Gurudev. But Nazrul was directly involved in the political tensions of his day which jarred on his feelings and had to be resolved before he could regain his sense of harmony with the life around him. Lack of political freedom was an agony; social injustice in manifold forms was an unbearable strain on life. Tagore's reactions both to political subjection and social disparity were strong. Yet he took it all in his stride in quest of a better and fuller life for all mankind. Nazrul felt too impatient to brook it even for a day. He was concerned with the present, the immediate. His resounding poem *Amar Kaiyat* (My Explanation) was a reply to the charge made by some of his contemporaries that he was no poet of the ages.

Nazrul felt, as it were, that his country must be free from political subjection before he could singleheartedly respond to man's permanent urges. He was also anxious to fight the social iniquities born of religious obscurantism and economic injustice which beset him at every step. But

being, as he was, a poet integrated with life, he always transcended himself and ceaselessly composed poems and songs in response to varied emotional stimuli. The thirties were for him pre-eminently a musical period devoted to the composition of songs and setting them to tune. But the decade commenced with a tragedy: the death from small-pox of his nearly three and half year-old son Bulbul who had already shown remarkable precocity. It had an unnerving effect on the boy's parents and intensified the spiritual bent of mind Nazrul had evinced as a boy. He came into contact with Sri Barada Charan Majumdar, the headmaster of Lalgola High School in Murshidabad district and was initiated by him into Yogic exercises. He turned his attention to the study of religious scriptures and wore saffron clothes. His literary life took a turn which showed his growing pre-occupation with the more abiding concerns of life. Composition of songs of spiritual fervour, re-discovery of many obsolete tunes, successful experimentation in blending of tunes and a literally unending flow of songs occupied him for the better part of a decade. It has already been mentioned that Nazrul used to sing and compose songs for village parties even in his boyhood. He also received a little knowledge of music from a teacher at his school. His novel *Kuhelika* (Fog), composed at Krishnagar, was published in 1931 and his book of stories *Seuli Mala* (Garland of Seuli Flowers) and a play called *Aleya* (Will-o-the Wisp) appeared the same year. His first three books of songs, as has been stated earlier, had been published towards the end of the preceding decade. A succession of song-books now followed and the next four years saw the publication of no less than nine books of songs by Nazrul.

The first of these, *Nazrul Swaralipi* (Notation of Nazrul's Songs) was succeeded by *Sur Saqi* (Melody the Saqi) published in 1931, *Zulfiqur* (The Sword) and *Bana-Giti* (Songs of the Forest) published in 1932, *Gul-Bagicha* (The Garden of Flowers) published in 1933, *Geeti-Satadal* (Lotus of Song) published in 1934, *Sur Lipi* (Records in Melody), *Sur-Mukur* (The Mirror of Melody) and *Ganer Mala* (The Garland of Songs)—all published in 1934. Due to his political record the British-owned Gramophone Company at first avoided him but as his songs became popular and were in great public demand, they appointed him their regular composer and trainer. Nazrul himself took regular musical lessons from Ustad Zamiruddin Khan and dedicated *Bana-Geeti* to him. He succeeded the Ustad as trainer in the Gramophone Company. The Calcutta station of the Indian Broadcasting Corporation also appointed him a composer and in that capacity Nazrul enlivened the station's musical programme with several new features and songs composed in ragas in his own improvisation. He also composed a large number of songs for plays by his literary friends and for films. He himself appeared as Narada in the successful Bengali film *Dhruba* of which he was music director. Once he appeared as an actor in his own play *Aleya*. Many of these songs were later collected and printed in the second volume of *Bulbul* published in 1952.

It has been suggested that the very intensity of emotion which was sometimes responsible for the great length of Nazrul's poems and an occasional imbalance in their metric structure, imparted concentrated power to his songs. Music flowed from him as from an inexhaustible fountain and found embodiment in an amazing variety of

admixture of melodies. They ranged from classical to folk tunes and also those imbibed by Nazrul from dances and songs of other realms. Dhrupad, khayal, thumri, and other classical styles are to be found in his songs equally with bhajan, gazal, kirtan, baul, bhatial, the style introduced by the eighteenth-century sage-singer Ramprasad and such others as have through the ages conveyed the love and devotion surging within the hearts of the people. Nazrul has adapted Arabic and Persian tunes with great spontaneity. Connoisseurs testify to the facility with which he reclaimed obsolete melodies and improvised new ones with a blending of those in vogue. They constitute a grand canvas of musical expression responding to the urges of various sections of the people. The facility and spontaneity with which Nazrul operated in the realm of songs is a perpetual wonder for all votaries of his music.

Bengali music, however, is never without a thought content. It is not satisfied with using words to merely convey styles and *talas* but is dependent for its fruition on a message—be it love of God, of one's country, of nature, of man or woman or some like emotion. The music of Nazrul Islam is many-splendoured. Love of the mother country was, of course, one of its major themes and breaks out in a number of fervent songs. Nazrul felt all the agonies of the mother-country held in subjection by a foreign power. But transcending them all was the dream :

I saw in a dream, Mother India, you as the Queen of
Queens.

Oh New India ! New India ! Songs in praise of you
resound throughout the world.

Nazrul's songs of patriotism have all the relevant facets:

Hindu-Muslim unity not the least among them. One of the vibrant songs being thus :

Hindus and Muslims are two brothers, two apples of Bharat's eye.

They are two plants in the same garden, one deodar and the other kadamba.

Nazrul's songs of romantic love number a legion. His invocation of nature is deep and vivid. Nature's varied forms and moods have been adequately captured in many of his songs which, through appropriate tunes, sustain lasting images in the people's minds. His devotional songs owned no denominational barriers. The perennial Radha-Krishna theme inspired a considerable number of his compositions which delight devout Vaishnava hearts as much as classical bhajans and kirtans do. No greater proof is needed of the fact that Nazrul was deeply integrated with the hearts of all communities living in the land, and of the intensely humanistic nature of his patriotism. Here are the first few lines, in translation, of a bhajan by Nazrul.

O my mind, let us go to the region of joy. Let us go,
oh my mind, to the region of joy : let us go to
the region of joy.

That is the region of love where one goes in sport of
love : of sorrow or grief there's none there. There
roams the eternal boy of Braja: he is Shyam who
plays on the flute. Let us go to the region of joy.

There's no death there, no fear : no creation, no
nemesis There's only the eternal youth, who never
has any fear.

Then, a Kirtan :

Where's the joy that could keep me at home ? If my Shyam has become an ascetic, I too shall become one : it is on me he used always to muse.

If his contemplation of me is now at an end, if he is to forget me, let him · I shall nevertheless always contemplate his beauty and become an ascetic.

Then the song proceeds in true Kirtan style with elaborate additions.

Nazrul's Islamic songs are reverberations of the pristine glory and beauty of Islam which consists in dedication to human welfare and equality among men. If there is a touch of revivalism in them, it is derived only from the political regeneration of Islamic countries after the First World War. Nazrul's universalism precluded him from recognizing any religious significance in that regeneration. The first song in *Zulfiqur* begins thus

The red torch of the spirit of Islam is again aglow in all directions.

You who are not aware of that fact, it's up to you to awake and light up the lamp of your life. Turkey has woken up with Ghazi Mustafa Kamal on to the pinnacle of glory :

The desolate land of Iran is awake today with Reza Shah Pahlavi :

The Egyptian has forgotten his slavehood and woken up, mad with life, with Zaglul.

Humanism was the sole content of those of his songs which were inspired by Hindu and Islamic ideologies. These, through it, merged into the mainstream of the

national life.

Ghazal was introduced by Nazrul into Bengali poetry. One of the very many Ghazals he wrote, began thus

Who is it, O dear, has come today to place flowers
on my grave :

You who have stolen my heart, have you remembered
me after such long lapse of time ?

Allow him whom you did not want in life, to sleep.
Don't break his trance of sleep, please don't, across
the borders of death.

LIVING touch with the soil caused in Nazrul an immediate response to folk tunes like Bhatial and Bhowai irrespective of the regions from which they sprang. Both East and West Bengal have a number of distinctive folk styles and Nazrul used practically all of them. Here are the opening lines of a typical Baul song, so called after the Bauls, a devotional sect of Bengal :

I am a mad Baul, brother, this my very body is my
temple.

The god of my heart does not live far away, the temple
that is his house is in my own mind. He lives always
in my heart in all joys and sorrows.

Sometimes I make obeisance to him, sometimes I hold
him to my heart. At other times I give him my
affection.

Bhatial, a moving tune sung in East Bengal, inspired many of Nazrul's songs. One begins thus :

O boatman, my brother, what's the sorrow that has
made you lose your anchor in the river that's without

end ! The rope that bound you to your home is torn :
you have not the money wherewith to cross the river.
That's why you float midstream on your own boat :
ebb and flow tides come in the river looking for the
tears in your eyes.

Nazrul's music includes a number of satires on hypocrisies in politics, society and religion, the irony in them being of a direct rather than subtle kind. Nazrul was himself a good singer and it was an enthralling experience for young men and women to listen to him singing a song or reciting a poem whenever he appeared before them as he often did. Though the world of music predominantly claimed him at this period, he could not but respond to calls from youth, student and literary conferences; for if there was anybody who could not afford to lose organic contact with the flow of life in his country, it was Nazrul.

VI. THE SWAN SONG

THUS PASSED the thirties. Grim destiny was already laying hands on him. Yet he did once more burst forth in an output of poems which had lain somewhat in abeyance during the period that he roamed freely in the world of melody. But many of the poems reflected the mystic mood which had been maturing in him. Those and others were later collected in a number of books when he ceased to be his normal self. *Nutan Chand* (The New Moon) was published in 1945. The very first poem set the tune of the book: that the newly arisen moon would show us the way of God to establish a world where there would be no difference of religion or race, no quarrel or division among the people, no temptation, no regrets. The book also includes poems of love but all pitched in a high key. The yearning for the beloved transcends itself into solace in the infinite and the eternal. But some other poems recapture the call of resurgent, rebellious youth which was the keynote of Nazrul's earlier response to the political and social urges of his times. A poem dedicated to Rabindranath on the latter's eightieth birthday is of uncommon sublimity in the intimate pathos of a relation which had been subjected to different pulls of life but which nevertheless had sustained itself in a deep mutual understanding. It was named *Asru Pushpanjali* (Offerings of Flowers of Tears). Another poem to Rabindranath celebrated him as the ever-young Rabindra. *Sikha* (The Flame) is a cry of agony at what the poet considers the nation's deviation from the fight for freedom into

a mere vote-catching exercise. There is also a poem addressed to the peasant asking him to arise and assert himself and still another describing the true Muslim as free and dedicated to the service of fellowmen. The poems in this book might be regarded as the last efflorescence of Nazrul's genius in self-abandon to the spirit of the times. *Sanchayan* (Collection) of fascinating poems for children appeared in 1955. *Maru Bhaskar* (The Sun of the Desert) a poetic delineation of the life and character of the Prophet, was published in 1957. *Shesh Saogat* (The Last Offering)—another collection of Nazrul's hitherto unpublished poems, reached the public in 1958. The themes in this book are varied, ranging from the patriotic to the literary. What is remarkable about the book is the rhyming of certain poems in it and certain songs, including a vivid one regarding East Bengal and a song-drama entitled *On the Banks of the Cauveri*. *Jhar* (The Storm), published in 1960, includes a resonant poem *Uthiachhe Jhar* (A Storm Has Broken Out) and other selections. A second volume of *Bulbul*, Nazrul's first book of songs, had been published in 1952. A collection of those of the articles published in *Dhumketu* which had been preserved, was published under the same title in 1960—rounding off a literary career which, even though it was brought to a premature end at his forty-second year, had presented his countrymen with twenty-one books of poems, fourteen of songs, six novels and collections of short stories, four books of essays and articles, three plays and a fourth for children, three books of poems for children and three translations from Persian.

But the sands were running out. An undertone of farewell rang in the speeches Nazrul made in the early

months of 1941. They had an avowedly mystic ring about them and are believed in retrospect to have indicated his retirement into the deeper recesses of his mind in a reaction against the disease that was corroding his brain. It was also the period when he devoted himself greatly to Yogic exercises. Presiding over a literary meeting at Banagram, a sub-divisional town in the district of 24 Parganas, not very far from Calcutta, on March 16, 1941, Nazrul said that he could no longer talk to the audience of literature ; he had tasted the sweetness of mysticism and found in it his true self. He spoke in a similar vein as president of the Silver Jubilee session of the Bengali Muslim Literary Conference in Calcutta in April, 1941. He had not been born to become a leader or a poet ; he had come for love, to end the horrible disparities between haves and have-nots, and not having succeeded in it, was taking his departure.

It was, however, not all over yet. His forty-third birth anniversary was celebrated at a public meeting on May 25, 1941. Tagore died on August 7, 1941 and Nazrul came out with poems one of which he broadcast from the Calcutta station of A.I.R. It was given to him in October of the same year to be of what proved to be his final service to nationalism by accepting the editorship of *Nabayug* revived by Mr. A. K. Fazlul Huq to fight against the Muslim League's two-nation theory. Nazrul himself felt like having been recalled to the service of his country and said so in a poem which has been included in *Shesh Saogat* :

I shall tread again the rough road of life ·
My friends, pray rejoin me.

In February, 1942 Marshal Chiang-Kai-Shek, the then head of the Chinese Government and Madame Chiang-Kai-Shek visited India and at the request of the Gramophone Company Nazrul composed an appropriate song for the occasion. His son, Kazi Sabyasachi, relates that on an evening in 1942 when the Second World War had spread to the East and Calcutta was under a black-out, his father went out of their then residence at Shambazar in the northern part of the city. Those were the days when Nazrul Islam had been devoting himself to Yogic exercises and seemed occupied in a spiritual quest. He failed to return that night and Sabyasachi with his younger brother and Sri Kalipada Guha Roy, a family friend who later lived the life of a Sannyasin at Banaras and died there recently, went out in frantic search of him. They failed to find him but late next day word came from the police that Nazrul had been sighted at Kamarhati in the northern suburb and lodged at the local hospital. They hurried to the place and learnt from the local people that Nazrul had presumably been on a visit to Dakshineswar, the place associated with Ramakrishna Paramhansa and had been walking along the Barrackpore Trunk Road absorbed in his own thoughts while army trucks rolled dangerously past him. Fearful for his safety, the people had pulled him away and sheltered him at the local hospital.

It was on the night of July 9, 1942 that fate struck its blow at Nazrul. He was doing a programme at the Calcutta station of A.I.R. when his tongue froze and words failed him. That was the end. Nazrul was taken back home. Soon he lost control of his brain as well. Measures for his treatment were taken with the help of

late Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, then a Minister in the Provincial Government and the active interest of Dr. B. C. Roy, subsequently Chief Minister of West Bengal. Nazrul was taken to Madhupur in Santal Parganas, but the change did him little good. A committee was formed under the chairmanship of Dr. Mookerjee to arrange for Nazrul's treatment and he was admitted into a mental hospital at Lumbini Park in Calcutta. Mr. Zulfikar Haider, also a writer, was the moving spirit of the committee. No improvement resulted, however. Communal riots and politics of partition halted further efforts at the time and it was not again until June, 1952, that Nazrul Niramay Samiti—an association for curing Nazrul of his illness—was formed. After preliminary treatment for four months at the Ranchi Mental Hospital, Nazrul and his wife were sent on May 10, 1953 from Calcutta for medical treatment in Europe. Specialists in London and Vienna differed on a diagnosis of Nazrul's illness but agreed that treatment at the early stage had been very inadequate and it was too late to expect recovery. Soviet specialists, to whom the case was referred, expressed the same opinion. Nazrul and his wife were brought back to Calcutta on December 15 of the same year. He has since been living with his sons the elder of whom, Kazi Sabyasachi Islam, is an artist much in demand for his ability at recitation and the younger, Kazi Aniruddha Islam, is a reputed guitar player and teacher. Their sick mother, Pramila Nazrul, died in May, 1962. The President of India has bestowed on Nazrul the award of Padmabhushan. Calcutta University has awarded him the valued Jagattarini Medal for his services to Bengali literature. The West Bengal Government awarded

Nazrul a monthly pension of two hundred rupees which has now been raised to three hundred. It has also sanctioned the gift of a piece of Government land for building a permanent residence for him. The East Pakistan Government gives him a pension of three hundred and fifty rupees per month. But for mental oblivion Nazrul lives his days now in serene calm.

VII. THE POET OF THE PEOPLE

NAZRUL ISLAM does not seem to have been the kind of poet that needs seclusion for the flowering of his genius. He must have had many private moments with himself. He must have, for many a while, withdrawn into nature. But he never gave the impression of needing complete retirement for the perfection of his literary work. As it turned out, he wrote many of his most meaningful poems while he was busy in journalistic work. He seemed to be always bursting with energy, to be on the move, to enjoy talk and mirth in the company of his friends. Even so, he wrote poems and songs almost at his will. He just took a little time off, sipped cups of tea and chewed betel-leaves and wrote out a good poem or song. Whether it was the rehearsal room of the Gramophone Company, the editorial office of a newspaper or just his own or a friend's house, the place where Nazrul happened to be resounded with his loud talk and uninhibited laughter. It seemed the life-stream flowed high in Nazrul and easily poured itself forth in poem and song. Its spontaneity bespoke a superb unity of Nazrul's inner personality with his outer. This spontaneity arose in the natural merger of many streams of thought in Nazrul's mind. The alluvial soil of Bengal has had the reputation of building up an emotional crust in the Bengali mind. Many currents of ideas have gone into the making of that crust. Modern Bengal has arisen out of seemingly conflicting but ultimately coalescing movements of religious and social ideas. Islam made an appeal to the depressed classes among Hindus and made millions of converts. Sri Chaitanya's

Vaishnavism was a protest against institutional religion and sought to sweep away social barriers in torrents of love. A great literary efflorescence, particularly in the production of *Padavalis* by Vaishnava poets, was the result. The invocation of Sakti or Power was symbolized in the worship of Goddess Kali which was resolved by Ramakrishna Paramahansa into an active social current. Swami Vivekananda made it crystalize in the worship of God through service of man. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee celebrated the mother country as the Mother and the cult of patriotism became a dynamic component of Bengali life. Political events canalized it into agitational and revolutionary channels; it flew into and out of the mainstream of Indian nationalism and synchronized with the mass movements of the twenties and thirties.

Away and apart from political tensions, folk life in Bengal has had its own forms of cultural expression. Bhatial in East Bengal, Jhumur in West, Baul in well-known centres all over the province, Kirtan in different styles developed both in Calcutta and outside and many other musical forms linked themselves, through Radha-Krishna, Sri Chaitanya and other themes, with Bengali culture. Liberal Muslim thought in the best Sufi tradition brought its own contribution to that culture. Muslim devotees and faqirs composed and sang songs in Murshida and other allied styles and left a deep impact on the minds of the whole people :

I die of regret, says Madan,

Temples and musjids have barred your way.

Lalan Shah Faqir of Jessore district was a great saint who delineated in song the eternal quest of man for God,

who is also the Beloved. Tagore regarded him as an example of the abiding philosophical quest among the masses.

These are some of the strands of thought which have through the ages emotionally built up the Bengali mind. Recent decades have impressed on them ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity and more specifically, of political and social freedom. The result has been a highly surcharged intellectual edifice, not always stable and sometimes prone to psychic disturbances. Yet the mental personality lends itself to versatile expression both in language and action.

Nazrul Islam has been its literary expression as nobody else has been. No great learning was his passport to a literary career; his concern with modern world literature has also been limited. But he imbibed the deep strains of Bengali life and gave expression to them in all their impacts, stances and appeals. It is not wholly known how he came to be integrated with the structure of life of his country in all its projections—religious, social, cultural and political. Some passages of his poetry seem drawn out; others appear to lack grace of concentrated expression. That is because his emotions have in his poetry a free, uninhibited play. The abandon with which he reacts to varied experiences is proof of his first-hand living therein. Passion predominates but not without lucid intervals of serenity.

As a litterateur Nazrul has been in a class by himself. His literary life ended soon after Tagore's death and that having been so, he was in a sense Tagore's contemporary. But the note of rebellion in his poetry, the passionate sweep of his creation, and his free sojourn in

the realm of improvised melodies, marked him apart in an age when all Bengali writers were, both in the content of their thought and their styles, more or less under the influence of Tagore. He was classed with the moderns when the latter appeared with their claim of freedom from inhibitions in regard to matters of sex and concern for the down-trodden. He even protested when Tagore characterized such concern as a mere "bravado of poverty" and criticized certain writers for their excessive use of Arabic and Persian words. Yet he was not the type to be anxious to belong to any particular school. He wrote poetry and song as he felt the urge to write and had to be taken only for what he was. It was not necessary, nor even possible, for him to be classified. His dialogue with his people was far too distinct and loud to need channelling through interpretation. The young generation was particularly enchanted by him. Alliteration and other methods of metrical effect figured prominently in his poems. Particular mention needs be made of his poems for children which appeal directly to children's imagination and have become very popular with them. Many of these poems have the effect of moving the child's imagination to greatness. Nazrul may thus be regarded as having commanded complete freedom of the realm of poetry and song.

Not of the other fields of literature, however. His short stories and novels present many purple patches of description—particularly of love and similar passions; but they are more of the nature of an account of human experience than a logical treatment of complicated ups and downs in human relationship. Revolutionary idealism and love beset by social disparity lend political over-

tones to some of Nazrul's stories and novels. It is vain to speculate if the art of writing stories and novels would have reached maturity in his hands had he been allowed to work on through the normal span of life. He wrote two three-act and four one-act plays. These are mostly of a symbolic character with romantic and patriotic themes but are not considered by critics to have attained the stature of real drama. As a translator from Persian—Hafiz and Omar Khayyam—Nazrul was quite successful. He undertook translation of the Holy Quran but could do only a part of it, the Ampara, and the translation has been adjudged as competently done. As an essayist, Nazrul's speciality has been his passionate reaction, in vibrant style and language, to current problems, and so his essays and articles possess, even besides the great impact they contemporaneously made, abiding literary and historical value. Nazrul's career as a journalist was primarily productive of such essays and articles but as editor, he showed a lively interest in all contemporary events and displayed a keen news sense and humour in his reactions to them. It is impossible to escape the overall conclusion that Nazrul Islam was never consciously anxious to make or concentrate on a literary career; he was only concerned to use his natural talents to voice the joys, sorrows, loves, fears and struggles of the people with whom his kinship of heart was complete.

VIII. THE POET IN THE FUTURE

EVEN AS he is still living, Nazrul Islam's day is done. That tragic fact makes it possible to look upon him somewhat in retrospect and to try to determine his place in the future. Now when the country is free, Nazrul is looked upon as the abiding messenger of revolt for political and social freedom. His poem *Bidrohi* proclaims man as supreme, confronting the universe both with his sword and his flute and knowing no rest until all oppression and injustice are removed from the face of the earth. That synonymity of manhood with freedom is perennial and so the newly risen generation, too, finds in Nazrul a poet after its heart. But his ethics is based on a firm faith in the ultimate dispensation of justice and does not lend itself to any anarchic philosophy. A forth-right belief in the need to ensure freedom and justice and to fight for that and not to rest till the objective is attained, is the bedrock of his political philosophy communicated through poems and songs that are a practical inspiration to all. That inspiration ever renews itself.

Nazrul Islam is a full and abiding representative of Bengali thought. The many streams of Bengali life and culture have merged in him and found adequate expression in his literature. A dent has been sought to be made in that unity by the two-nation theory which was sought to be reinforced by an argument in favour of cultural divergence between Hindus and Muslims; but so far as Bengal was concerned, that argument did not make much headway. East Pakistan is, of course, developing its own literature and attempts have been made to give it a religio-

communal character if only by deliberate substitution of Bengali words long in vogue by the introduction of words from Arabic and Persian. Part of the attempt has been to wean away East Pakistan from Tagore and to have him regarded as an alien poet. But the attempt has not succeeded and little divergence has been noticed in the trends of literary development in East Pakistan and West Bengal. The divergence has been confined to the very natural use in East Pakistani literature of words in colloquial use in Muslim families. This is a divergence that does not divide literature but enriches it. Nor has any serious literature, projected along the alleged cultural divergence between Hindus and Muslims, emerged in East Pakistan. Orthodox Muslim circles looked askance at Nazrul Islam in the early years of his career for what they considered to be his renegade outlook; but as his deep influence came to be felt, he came to be regarded as a figure of self-justification for the Muslim community and a major contributor by his work to Muslim renaissance. His historical role as the voice of unity of Bengali life and culture is conceded by East Pakistan and thus he remains an abiding link between East and West Bengal. He remains and will remain a lasting image of pre-partition Bengal. But because of the very dent sought to be made in that unity and successfully made in the political life of Bengal, there has been a real revival of Nazrul Islam in West Bengal shortly after the partition of the erstwhile province of Bengal, from the comparative obscurity to which the sudden end of his literary and political life and the communal overtones in current politics had somewhat relegated Nazrul. That was the period when he was taken as more or less granted and the potentialities of his lite-

rary work fell to the background. In recent years he has been, as it were, recalled as at once the repository and evangelist of values which should not have been allowed to go under. His birthday is now widely celebrated, his poems are popularly recited and his songs sung. Institutions have been founded in his name. Treatises have been appearing on his life and work. There is a noticeable anxiety to enshrine Nazrul and his ideals for ever in Bengali life.

Political gains from division inhibit to a degree the regret felt in East Pakistan at the defeat of Nazrul's ideals on the political plane; but offset against conformity of cultural outlook, they do not detract from appreciation of the cosmopolitan canvas of Nazrul literature. Orthodox circles are not happy about it and demur to the acceptance of Nazrul on the grounds that he is an Indian and that he never accepted the ideology of Pakistan. But their objections have been unavailing against the overwhelming popularity of Nazrul in Eastern Pakistan. It is expected, therefore, Nazrul will abide as a link between West Bengal and East Pakistan. West Pakistan, too, has by now come to respect East Pakistan's acceptance of Nazrul. As an embodiment of an all-embracing Bengali culture the image of Nazrul Islam is now, both in thought and memory, permanent.

Nazrul Islam's uncompromising nationalism, stand for social justice and against division and obscurantism of all sorts and his call in enthralling prose, poetry and song for human values, are now parts of public consciousness. During the Chinese aggression in 1962 he proved to be one of the surest fountains of inspiration for the people's stand for national freedom and honour. India, as a whole,

has come to be aware of his permanent contribution to the national store-house of literature. His poems will continue to inspire and his songs, unusally rich both in melody and content, will always be sung. It has been given to Nazrul Islam to work only a part of the appointed span of life; yet public acknowledgement of his creation, continued fulfilment of his inspiration and prospective continuation of his impact on the lives and minds of future generations, bid fair to ensure for him a lasting place in the annals of time.

TRANSLATION OF SOME POEMS

THE REBEL

Say, courageous one—

Say, high I hold my head !

The Himalayas look up at mine and humbly bow their
peaks.

Say : I pierce through the great sky of the universe,
I reach above the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars,
I break through the limits of earth and all the heavens
And even the seat of God almighty,
And rise ever higher

To the eternal surprise of the Ruler of the Universe.

On my brow shines Shiva the Destroyer¹

as the benedictory seal of the triumph of king of kings !

Say, courageous one—

My head remains ever high !

I am ever irrepressible, impudent and merciless :

I am the dancing Shiva of the Great Cataclysm,

I am cyclone, I am destruction,

I am mortal terror, I am the curse of the earth,

I am irresistible,

I destroy everything to bits !

I am the negation of all rule, I am reckless,

¹ In Hindu mythology, Shiva is the Supreme Deity lording it over destruction and dissolution. He is also the Preserver guarding over the welfare of all and sundry. One of his beneficent acts was to hold in his matted locks the rushing cascade of the river Ganga as she descended from the Himalayan hills into the plains. This act is said to have made Gangetic civilization possible.

Manifold aspects of Shiva have been touched upon in this poem.

I trample down all restraints, all bonds of do's and
don'ts !

I obey no law,

I sink vessels laden to the brim,

I am the torpedo and the terrible floating mine !

I am Shiva with his flying locks¹

who ushers the untimely nor'wester of summer,

I am the rebel, the mutinous child of the Goddess
of the universe !

Say, valiant one : my head remains ever high !

I am the storm, the tornado,

I go on pulverising whatever comes in my way.

I am dance-mad rhythm,

I dance on to my own time-beat,

I am uninhibited joy of life—

I am the ragas Hambir, Chhayana², Hindol²,

I am quick with movement, I go my way

with quick gestures and sudden leaps and bounds—

I am Hindol with its lightning-quick arias.

So, friend, I do whatever my mood dictates,

I embrace adversaries or wrestle with them—

I am violent mad, I am the sudden storm !

I am the plague, the terrifier of the earth.

I am the ruler's terror, am mass destruction,

I am burning hot, ever restless.

Say, brave warrior—

Ever high stands my head.

¹ The reference is to Shiva in the *tandava* episode when his berserk dance threatened the destruction of the universe.

² Indian musical modes evocative of joy and tranquility.

I am ever reckless, ever ungovernable,
I am irrepressible, the cup of my life
 is always, yes always, full to the brim.
I am the sacrificial fire,
I am Yamadagni who kept the sacred fire ever alive,
I am Yagna¹ and the officiating priest,
I am Agni, the god of fire !
I am Creation, I am Destruction,
I am human habitation and the cremation ground,
I am the termination, the end of night !
I am the son of the Queen of gods with the moon
 in my hand and the sun on my brow,
One hand holds the curved bamboo flute
 and the other the trumpet of war.
My throat is black from drinking poison
 churned up from the ocean of pain !
I am Shiva who catches in his matted locks
 the mad waters of the cascade at Gangotri—
Say, fearless one : my head stands ever high.

I am the bedouin, I am Chengis,
I salute none but myself.
I am thunder, I am the sound of Om on Shiva's horn,
I am the trumpet of Israfil² that blasts fiercely,
I am the castanet and the trident of Shiva,
I am the staff of justice of the Great Just.³
I am the fearsome din of the primeval Om,

¹ Hindu ritual in honour of gods before the lighted fire.

² Arab name for the archangel Raphael

³ Dharamaraj, or Yama, dispenser of divine justice.

I am the wheel and the great conch of Vishnu¹ !
I am a disciple of the mad sages Durvasa and
 Viswamitra,²
I am the forest fire and shall burn down the universe !
I am open-hearted laughter and exaltation,
I am creation's enemy—the great terror,
I am the Dragon's Head engulfing the Twelve Suns
 at the Great Destruction !
I am serene sometimes, sometimes restless, ruthlessly
 self-willed,
I am Youth with red blood, I am he that humbles God.
I am the ebulliance of the storm, the ocean's great din,
I am bright, shining ever bright,
I am the rippling surge of water and the roll of moving
 waves !

I am the plaited braid of the heart-free maiden's locks,
 and the fire in the eyes of the girl of winsome shape.
I am the wild love blossoming lotus-like
 in the heart of the sweet sixteen—
Blessed am I !
I am the absent mind of the indifferent,
 the tearful sigh in the widow's heart
 and the lament of the despairing yearner,
I am the sorrow of deprivation in the heart
 of the homeless wanderer living on the road,
I am the heart-pangs of the humiliated, and, again,
 the burning torment in the soul of love outthrown !

¹ In the hands of Vishnu, the wheel is the weapon of destruction of the wicked and the conch is for sounding the warning of the start of a campaign for this purpose.

² Two irascible *rishis* of mythology, destructively bent.

I am the numbing pain in the offended, long-aggrieved
heart,
I am the trembling stealer of imagined kisses
and the quaking first touch of the virgin.
I am the lightning glance of the secret beloved
and the repeated looks on every pretence,
I am the love of the restless girl and the jingle of her
bracelets.
I am the eternal child, the eternal boy,
I am the hem of the garment, the breast-cloth and the
scarf of the village maiden timorous of her youth
I am the north wind, the breezes of spring
and the east wind that causes the mind to stray,
I am the deep melody of the wayfaring bard
and the music of the bamboo flute.
I am the raging thirst of summer, the blazing sun,
I am the trilling spring in desert oases
and the kaleidoscope of lush verdure.
I rush forward in a transport of joy—
What madness ! I am mad !
I have suddenly discovered myself, and all my bonds
have fallen off !

I am rise and fall, the consciousness in inert minds,
I am the banner of victory over the gateway of the world.
I rush, fleet as storm, clapping my hands that hold heaven
and earth—
My carriers, the spirited Borrak and Uchchairsava,¹
sprint with challenging neighs !

¹ Mythical winged horses in Arab and Hindu mythologies respectively.

I am the volcano in the bosom of earth,
the forest fire, the holocaust of doom,
and the reverbations of the surging sea of fire in
bowels of the earth !
I climb the lightning and fly, leaping, snapping my fingers,
I set sudden earthquakes on and terrify the world.
I clasp to me the fangs of Vasuki the snake,¹
I catch with my hands the flaming wings of the angel
Jibrail !²
I am a heavenly cherub, I am ceaselessly active,
I am impudent and tear with my teeth
the garment of the Mother of the Universe !
I am the magic flute of Orpheus³—its music lulls
the heaving ocean into drowsy forgetfulness, and
in sleep it kisses the earth and soothes it to complete
silence.
I am the flute in the hands of Krishna.⁴
As I rage and rush, enveloping the boundless heavens,
The fires of all the hells down below flicker and die in
panic !
I am the carrier of rebellion all over the earth.

I am the deluge and floods of Sravan,
I make the earth sometimes beautiful,
sometimes blessed in destruction—

¹ The Great Snake of mythology with a thousand heads

² The archangel Gabriel

³ The Olympian flutist of Greek mythology.

⁴ Krishna, the divine flutist, whose music in his boyhood made the maidens of Braj delirious with love for him.

I shall snatch away the twin ladies from Vishnu's breast !¹
I am lawless, a meteor, malevolent saturn,
I am the comet's terrific heat, the venomous killer snake !
I am Chandi of the severed head,²
 the goddess of war who causes absolute ruin,
I sit in the fires of hell and smile the smile of flowers !

I am of the earth made, I am formed of the spirit,
I am ageless, immortal, inexpendible, inexhaustible !
I am the terror of men and demons and the gods,
I am ever unconquerable in the universe,
I am the God supreme over the God of the universe,
The all-transcendent Truth,
I dance my way madly over heaven, hell and earth !
I am mad, I am mad !
I have discovered myself, and today all my bonds are off !

I am the ruthless axe that Parasuram³ carried
 and will rid the world of its tribe of warriors
 and usher calm, generous peace !
I am the plough on Balaram's⁴ shoulders
 and will uproot with effortless ease this world
 in chains, in the joy of creating it anew.

¹ The reference is to Lakshmi and Saraswati, goddesses of Plenty and Knowledge respectively.

² A manifestation of the Supreme Sakti in extreme abandon, when she severed her own head and danced with it in her hand.

³ An incarnation of Vishnu who liquidated the Kshatriyas i.e. the martial caste

⁴ Balaram, elder brother of Krishna, who wielded the plough as his insignia and was said to possess unlimited strength.

And I shall rest, battle-weary rebel, only on the day
when the wails of the oppressed shall not rend the air
and sky,
and the scimitar and the sword of the oppressor
shall not clang in the fierce arena of battle—
That day my rebel self, weary with fighting,
shall rest appeased.

I am Bhrigu¹ the rebel, and I stamp
my footprints on the bosom of God !
I shall kill the Creator and shall cleave the heart
of capricious God, who smites with grief and anguish !
I am Bhrigu the rebel and will stamp my footprints
on the bosom of God !
I will cleave the bosom of that capricious being—God !

I am the courageous, rebel eternal—
Alone, I tower over the universe with my head unbowed.

THE COOLIE

I saw the other day at a railway halt a lordling pushing
a man down simply because he was a coolie.
Tears gushed in my eyes : must the weak throughout

¹ A *rishi* of Indian mythology who, angry with Vishnu, stamped his feet on His chest

the world be thus assaulted ? The steam chariot is propelled by the bones of the tribe of Dadhichi¹ represented by the coolie, but it is the Babus who ride the chariot and the coolies go under.

Do you say you have paid them wages ? Shut up, you tribe of liars. Speak out how many pies you have paid them and how many crores you have got in return. Your motors go along the road, ships sail on the sea, steam-chariots run along railway tracks, factories crowd the land, just say whose gifts all these are ! With whose blood has your building been painted red ? Remove your blinkers, you will find the answer written in every brick. You don't know, but every speck of dust on the road knows what that road, that ship, that chariot and that building mean in terms of human sacrifice.

The auspicious day is near when the debts, piling up day after day, will have to be paid. Those who have wielded hammer, shovel and spade and have demolished the mountains, whose bones lie scattered on both sides of the road cut through the mountains, who have reduced themselves to being *mazdoors*, porters and coolies for the purpose of serving you, who bespattered their bodies with dust in order to carry your burdens—they are true men, they are gods and of them I sing.

It is over their anguished hearts that the new resurgence steps and makes its way here. Vain is your hope

¹ A saint of Hindu mythology who donated his bones to the gods in order that the bones are fashioned into the thunderbolt to destroy the demon-king Vritra, an enemy of the gods.

that you will repose high on the second floor and we shall remain down below and yet call you gods. The helm of the world's affairs will be controlled by those whose bodies and minds are moist with love for the soil ! We shall gather the dust from feet that have become dirty from walking in step with all one's fellow-men, and receive it on our heads with reverence.

Today the new dawn of the new morning rises red with the blood of the whole world writhing in pain. Break open all the rust-jammed doors of the heart ! Take away all those painted covers over the skin. Let all the air in the sky that has gone deep blue, enter the heart in a wild spree and open all the shutters ! Let the whole sky crash into this our home, let the moon, sun and stars pour over our heads !

Let all men of all countries and all times stand together at one confluence of humanity and listen to the flute music of one great union. Should a single man be hurt the pain strikes equally the hearts of all here ; Should one man suffer indignity it is a shame for all mankind, an insult to all ! Today it is the grand uprising of the great agony of universal man, God smiles above and Satan trembles below for fear !

OF THEM I SING

Of them I sing...

Of the youth of today who in spirited pride wield the sharp sword and go out in all directions for achieving the impossible.

And who have left recorded annals of their work of demolition of million era-old pyramids of ancient mummies.

Whose breath has swept away the dry leaves of worn-out books.

Who march and destroy shrines and dens of false gods and the age-old toddy-shops of pseudo-virtuous, senile moralists.

Whose torrential life-flow has swept away the ancient dung-heap, the seemingly irremovable rock of prejudices and the bare bones of scriptures.

Who, clean of soul, have fearlessly marched into the pavilion of false illusions and, armed with clubs of rationality, have mercilessly and with infinite daring driven hammers and crowbars in the Chinese Wall of regulations and prohibitions.

Who have ploughed up the cemeteries and have thrown away all corpses and skeletons, have turned them into flowering orchards and have, by foregathering on life's seashore, made it resound with their shouts.

Who are marching forward today on the road of life in step with the world.

Of him I sing...

Of the pilgrim who only the other day set forth alone at midnight on his raft in the turbulent ocean and did not return to shore in the morning. Even today I lie awake at dead of night, wipe my tears and compose songs for that reckless one. Even today I sleep not, wait for his return and sing.

The one who failed to return in the morning flew at night in a transport bound for the sky, a traveller to the infinite searching for a new world. For fear of him the keeper of the gate of death stands awake in unremitting vigil.

I have come to salute, and sing of those who, from high concern for life, ever chase after death all over the horizons, in the depths of the sea and the boundless vastness of the sky, who delve in the realm of Mammon in the bowels of the earth and collect priceless jewels, who brave the torments from the poisonous fangs of the she-snake and lift the gem from her hooded head; who have hurled themselves against the god of thunder, received thunderbolts on their imperious heads and made a slave of the fleet-footed daughter of the clouds; whom the wind obeys and fans.

My lament hums round the whole world — of those whom the hangman's rope has strangled to the point of weariness : and in whose prison cells the dawn that was a captive of some past might awakens from her sleep and smiles !

HE WHO HAS LOST HIS ALL

That is a bank, made of treacherous quicks and, ringed in by deep waters of anguish in which one can't get a foothold but must keep swimming. Who are you, madcap, that set put up home on such a bank? Over in the sky the lightning flashes a signal—you who have lost your all wind up this habitat; the cloud, like a mother, showers torrents of her tears over your head and the earth afar calls to you with her waving hands of trees.

Your daughters shed ringing tears in the tumult of the pouring flood—the sea that is their mother has called them to her lap. Oh boatman, boatman! Set sail today! The untamed horses of the storm ride the boisterous waves. What are you waiting for, brother? Raise your anchor of illusory attachment!

Your day is almost done in the crumbling courtyard of your home. Boatman, look! Your pet doe looks yearningly at the shore. Away go your companions, closes in the dark Sravan night of rain. Spread no more your tattered mat of sorrow and sleep no more. Is it so hard to snap the bonds of that tearful sorrow?

You did not ask for diamonds and jewels, nor for money by the crores. All your wants would only fill a tiny earthen pot. You wanted a sleep that relieves your weariness, sleep on a mat in tatters, and a tiny cot with the doorway lit by a single lamp. And then came death and old age like burrowing thieves.

Boatman, launch your boat for a return to the bosom of the earth. Let your feet strike on the hard earth and go

gory with blood You will move on up the path to Doom,
you will trample underfeet hills, wilds and mountains !
The rain roars, the sea water dances around you in a ring.
You, adventurer of the seas, do now turn back to the
bosom of the earth.

HINDU-MUSLIM WAR

Take heart ! Take heart ! Meseems
India has come alive at long last.
The cremation ground and the burial yard
have sprung today to life.
Those who were condemned to eternal death
have been shocked by pain into awakening,
Khaled¹ wields his sword again,
And Arjuna² strings his bow.
India has woken up : Hindus and Muslims
have taken up the cudgels in their hands.

Hindus die, Muslims die from each other's blows—
It is the living that are dying :
such death carries no shame !
They fight because their strength has surged,
and they know each other anew through clash of arms.
The test today is : whose the stronger fist ?

¹ A Muslim warrior-hero, nicknamed "Sword of God".

² The great warrior hero of the Mahabharata.

Who would die in tomorrow's head-on clash
and who aren't willing to die ?

Come and listen to the clamour of life
from the throats of half-alive men—
Nectar will come up soon, for poison is already up !
Cease not—go on with churning !
Kaffirs¹ are up, so are yavanas.²
Now shall arise the real Hindus and Muslims
of great might.
You have awakened, God too has,
His machine has started working.

It seems today the master and the pupil
are engaged in a trial of strength.
Time is dealing blow after blow to make
timorous India fearless.
Time is watching if the wrist or the clenched fist
gives way at the softest blow,
and watching, too, who makes the grade
by striking hard and wins the fight,
and which general keeps his head cool in this mock
warfare.

Who is this so-called hero
who at sight of a few drops of blood
is burrowing under the quilt and patchwork rug,
putting away his sword, has besmeared himself with
ink
and is mouthing delirious nonsense !

¹ Non-believers, *i.e.*, Hindus

² lit. aliens, *i.e.*, Muslims.

Goodness, would these poltroons
lead the revolution-to-come !
What could they do when storm and cyclone break,
they whose brains reel at a mere whiff of squall ?
Providence is testing
who can swim across the sea of blood.

Your own blows have razed
your temples and mosques
whose foundations were laid
by the tainted hands of a subject people.
It seems God himself is effacing
the prayer-houses of those who are others' slaves !
Martyrs will raise the altar
with earth consecrated by bond-free hands.
Have the spires fallen ?
Well, so has your slumber collapsed with them.

Who kills whom ?—The puzzle is not yet solved,
the darkness not yet gone,
they know not that in the darkness
they mistake their own for enemies and hit them !
The sun will rise, the confusion will dissolve,
vision will clear, barriers will be down,
and they will see that they have killed
their brothers behind barred doors !
The trident and the sword
have cut and slashed the destiny of India !

The cudgel that has today broken the mosques
and brought down the temple spires
will tomorrow reduce the enemy fortress to shambles !
That morning brothers will not fight one another,

They will know their enemies from their own folk.
Let them quarrel : they have at least awakened
—Fly the flag of victory !
If your tail has been set on fire.
Burn with it the golden city of Lanka¹ !

THE SONG OF THE STUDENTS

We are the power and the strength—
we the students.
The storm dies under our feet,
above us are the sky, the storm and rain.
We are the students.

We march barefooted in the darkness
of night on a difficult road,
with the impact of our terrific march
we redden the hard earth with blood !
In age after age our blood has wetted the soil of the
earth
—the blood of us students.

¹ The reference is to the Ramayana story of the burning of the golden city of Lanka, the seat of the demon king Ravana, by Hanuman whom Ravana had captured and made sport of by tying oil-soaked rags on his tail and setting are to it. Hanuman retaliated by breaking his chains and setting the buildings of Lanka on fire.

Our souls fly unbounded almost like the unorbited comet.

We are ever the sacrifices at the altar of the Goddess of Luck.

When Goddess Lakshmi ascends to heaven
We reach the limitless blue below,
we students.

We hold the reins of the sacrificial horse
of the king of death—
our deaths record the annals of our lives !
We bring ruinous tears into the land of laughter—
we the students.

We make mistakes when everyone offers sage advice.
While the cautious ones build up dams
we erode the banks.
We the young make the road
slippery with our blood in the dreadful night,
we the students.

The lamp of wisdom shines in our eyes,
our hearts are full of illuminating speech,
the call of eternity rings in our confident voices.
We have reddened with fresh blood
the white lotus of Goddess Saraswati,
we the students.

These days of revolt of the masses
we lay down our heads,
in us cries the liberation of the century !
We have filled the verdant train
of the mother's cloth with tears of glory,
we the students.

We build the future of love and hope,
the galaxy in the sky points our way to heaven.
May the dreams of all the world's men and women
be fulfilled in our visions :
the visions of us—students !

MARCHING SONG

Chorus :

March on, march on !
The drum resounds in the sky above,
the earth below is all agog,
You the corps of youth of the scarlet dawn—
March on, march on !
We shall knock at the door of dawn
and usher in the bright red morning.
We shall put an end to the murky night
and to obstacles as big as the mountains.
We shall sing the song of the ever new
and shall liven up the cremation ground of thousands.
We shall impart new life and fresh strength in
the arms.
March on, new youth,
Listen carefully to the call of life
on the threshold of death !
Break, break the barriers—
March, march ! Let us march on !

Chorus :

March on, march on, etc.

Above, thunder rolls out the command :

You soldiers pledged to martyrdom

muster, march out in all directions

and open up the chamber of sleep !

Long ago you lost the royal status,

yet the wanderer still longs for the past

and sings and sheds tears.

Let the fabulous throne of by-gone empire

be by-gone.

Awake, you insensible ones !

Note how countries like Persia, Rome,

Greece, Russia and so many of them went under.

Yet they have all awakened again :

you weaklings, awake, arise !

We shall build up a new Taj Mahal out of dust and
soil !

March on, march on, march on !

Chorus :

March on, march on, etc.

MY EXPLANATION

I am the poet of the present, brother :

No prophet of the future am I.

You may call me a poet or refuse to call me one ;
I keep my mouth shut and bear with it all.

Some say : "Mind, your place in the future will be with the tribe of stubborn women ! Where is the message of the Eternal such as comes out of the pen of Rabindranath ?"

So they all blame me ;
yet I am content to sing the morning tune of Bhairabi.

My poet friends read my writings and despair of me.
They sigh for me.

Say they : "He was useful. But in ministering to politics he is becoming steadily useless. He has given up studies and has gone to dogs."

Some say : "He has been devoured by his wife."
Some again say : "In jail he used only to play cards, has got fat and become useless."

Some others say : "It was well you were in jail. We would rather you went to jail."

Says the guru¹ : "So you have commenced relieving people of their beards with your sword !"

I have a lover who in a letter every Saturday² abuses me and says : "You are the bird with a notoriously coarse voice."

¹ This refers to the incongruity of a poet dabbling in active politics, on which Rabindranath had humorously admonished Nazrul.

² The reference is to a Bengali periodical *Shamberer Chitthi*, which used to abuse Nazrul.

No sooner I say, "My love, I would reveal your secret at the market place," than the letter hurriedly stops !

I left it all and married, but the Hindus said : "No truck with you, Chacha!"

I wonder whether I am a Yavan² or a Kafir³ and look to see whether I have a pigtail or a beard,

And I wag the back and the folded position of my cloth to see if it rests like that.

The moulavis and mollahs, out to taste the joy of life, wave their hands and say : "The wretch takes the names of gods and goddesses. You combine and put him out of the pale. Here is our fatwa⁴ : This Kazi is a Kafir though he might be ready to martyr himself. We have read the 'Ampara', we vaunt ourselves and go about helping ourselves to feasts."

And the Hindus think: "This man uses Persian words in his poems. He must be the worst type of Muslim."

Nor are the raw non-violent non-co-operators pleased with me.

They say that I am the fiddle of violence and minister to revolutionary minds !

But the revolutionary thinks, "The fellow is a votary of non-violence ; else why should he sing of the charka ?"

The orthodox think I am an atheist, the modernists think I am a Confucian,

¹ Literarily, 'uncle' but used by Hindus in an ironical sense referring to a Muslim.

² Contemptuous appellation for Muslim.

³ An infidel.

⁴ Injunction : the word is Arabic.

Swarajists think I am a dissenter,
Dissenters consider me a thorn in their ways.

Men think I am too much enamoured of women,
Women think I am a woman-hater !

Friends who have been abroad note that I have not been
to England and say : "So this is your limit, shame !"

Admirers call me "The Sun of the New Age,"

Even if I am not a poet of the age,

I am one of the crazes of the moment, all right !

Brothers, thus I contemplate and steal my heart,

I sleep with my spectacles fixed on my ears
And sleep all the more well !

Do you think even I can make head or tail of what I
write ?

My hand does not pose itself high, so I write with bowed
shoulders.

Friends, you have not regarded my writings at their
proper value :

But the King's Government have saved my prestige !

They regarded my writings as priceless and so forfeit these
to them without any price !

And, oh, don't you know whom the King's sentinels are
chasing all the while ?

You have, friend, looked within the temple of my mind.
My bones have become black with toil.

Yet I cannot put my accursed mind within a prison !
As many times as I chain it down it breaks all chains;
I have struck it down and rendered it effete;
It does not obey even Tagore or Gandhī.
Suddenly it awakens and in the darkness of night
Looks for a tiger of the forest !

I tell my mind, "Oh, you madcap, listen to me.
You are now living jolly well.
You have become a semi-leader.

But should you let this opportunity slip ?—
You can, alas, never be a full leader !

Just make use of the moment and keep ground chillies in
your pocket so that you speechify at meetings and shed
tears.

And in the bargain have the leaky roof of your house
mended, else you will repent in the long run !"

But it won't understand : it dons the garb of a wander-
ing minstrel and goes singing from place to place.

People listen to the song and think : What's there to
worry about ?

Days will pass henceforth in the pleasure of eating betel
leaves !

There will be no malaria epidemic,

Swaraj comes riding a gorgeous phaeton.

Subscriptions are wanted, people give the money with

which they would buy food to appease their hunger, and their children wail.

Say their mothers to them, "Keep quiet, you wretches : look and see

Swaraj is coming !"

But the hungry child does not want Swaraj ; all it wants is a little rice and salt.

The day ebbs, the darling has had nothing to eat; its tiny stomach is burning with pain.

So I cry and rush like mad :

My infatuation for Swaraj vanishes, I don't know where.

I cry and say, Oh God ! are you still there ?

Why are those who drink the blood of this child, not smeared with tar and lime ?

We know that we talked of bringing Swaraj
but have brought only baked brinjal¹.

A crore of rupees has been obtained out of sucking the hungers of hundreds of crores of children and robbing them of their morsel.

Still Swaraj has not come !

A hungry community can give no more money.

We ask the tiger to be content with eating grass, while it snatches the child from its mother's breast and eats it up.

We saw a mother cover up her son's dead body and go out to beg.

¹ A Bengali idiom meaning worthless stuff.

I cannot speak any more, friend !
There is great anguish and pain in my heart
What I have seen and heard has made me run amok;
So I say whatever comes out of my mouth.
I cannot alone cause blood to be shed
So I write these blood-red pieces.
I am in great sorrow, brother,
Such big words and big thoughts do not come
out of my brain.
Friends, those among you who are happy
Please undertake the task of writing immortal poetry.

I care not whether I shall live or not when the craze of the
age is over.
Rabi¹ shines over my head, there are hundreds of boys
worth their weight in gold. Let this be your prayer :
May my writings in letters of blood write the nemesis
of those who rob and eat the food of thirty-three crores
of human souls !

BLIND GOD OF MY COUNTRY

Holding to the hangman's rope
comes the blind god of my country.
His footsteps follow at every moment

¹ Sun—meaning, Rabindranath.

the bloodstained footprints of the pilgrims of death,
and he carries on his forehead
which bears marks of the torment of ages
the dark-blue brand of shame !

The sky is blind with clouds dense without a break;
blind, too, is the dark night !
The lamp is out in the hands of the fog-blind Spirit of
the horizon;
in the midst of these
the sightless god strays with laboured steps—
on the road that bristles with skeletons hurting his feet.
The enemy strikes him with the stick of torture;
the god makes it his staff and walks
towards the unseen road—the sightless god
—step by step without ceasing;
the more the hazards of the road the more he finds
renewed strength to move on.
When he falters and falls
a young pilgrim of death raises him to his bosom !

The prisoner sits awake
behind the barred door of the blind dungeon.
Where the scaffold is every day drenched with blood,
the human soul is crushed every while
in the ruthless grip of tyranny,
where the jewel glows on the serpent's head
in the darkness of the cave,
where the sleepless savage youth
wakes, nursing the pangs of hunger,
in the company of wild animals with teeth and claws,
where women have to sacrifice their lives
as victims of the butcher's block—

on that road walks the blind god and weeps aloud,
'Oh you, arise at once,
comes dawn crimson with your blood, the night is
ending !

The night is dark, the traveller rushes
in response to the call of the unknown,
knowing not the road nor the realm above
from which the god calls to him.
He knows only that he has heard the call
and that his lazy feet have quickened
in sympathetic response,
and that he sees a road before him.
He has only seen the road rising
and the god above him—
and who cares to see the treacherous quicksands,
the hills and the arid desert that bestrew the road ?

The traveller rushes, the road along with him;
the moonless night keeps him company.
He falls down on the road and holds by the hand
his god on the pretext of death.
Then they march side by side—
Death, the youth, the blind god
—and the smile of the new dawn !

THE FLAMINGO

Darkness envelops this bank and the other.
A boundless ocean of mystery intervenes :

on this side of the ocean the ruddy gander
keeps awake and weeps for the goose.
He had got her as his life's abiding mate
on some happy day on this river's bank
in some forgotten previous birth.
Then came the unending night of separation,
A feather of that memory still lies
near his aching heart.

The day has passed but the night seems
endless :
the far-off other bank of the river
is out of sight.

A barrier stands between this bank
and that through the ages :
Radha is on one bank : she looks
at the endless sea and weeps.
The flute plays a tune but really fills
the vast void of this separation.
We convey to others the tune played
by that flute :

We weep and the entire universe weeps
with us afflicted with pain.

Beyond the thirteen rivers and seven seas
in some unknown region,
in some land of planets and stars
the beloved of the first day of creation
cries in chains.

'Don'ts' create a night for her
over all the ten directions.
On this side of the river he seeks
his companion in vain

on the edge of forgetfulness
Then he always misses his way
Many, many times he thinks he has got
his beloved in his heart—
many, many times yet he loses her
he has never forgotten his beloved
whom he has never attained

It is for her that he writes
his immortal tale of tears
in a hundred tunes and a hundred songs,
in poetry, in ballad, in painting
and in the inert stone
That is reflected in the images we create
That song we sing for the people,
we poets and artists

On the brink of this pain dark at dead of night,
writhing in separation, the flamingo
goes around and seeks
the companion who with sunrise at morn
calls him somewhere to union
We are the dew of the earth in our tears
Glistens the coloured rainbow
of that hope of his

HELMSMAN, BEWARE

Chorus :

Pilgrims, beware ! You have to cross at dead of night
mountains hard to climb, dense wildernesses
and boundless, difficult seas !

The bark rocks and dips, the ocean swells,
the boatman misses his bearings, the sails are torn.
Who now takes the helm ? Who has the daring ?
Come forward, vigorous youth—Destiny calls out :
high rages the storm, yet the boat must sail across.

Murky is the night : you sentries who have taken
the sacred vow to the Mother, look alert !
Agony pent up through ages is out on a massive
march.

Resentment foams and rises in the hearts of those
deprived—
They must be taken along and given their rights.

The helpless nation is about to drown, knowing not to
swim—

Captain ! now is the hour of test for your vow to free
the Mother.

Who is he that asks, “What are they, Hindu or
Muslim ?”

Captain, say it's Man who drowns—my Mother's
offspring !

Here is the mountain gorge, the pilgrims are
filled with fear as thunder rolls with awesome roar,

and those following in the rear have rising doubts.
Captain ! Will you miss your bearings ? Quit them in
mid-sea ?

They fight among themselves, yet you must
carry them along with you, for the great burden is
yours !

Captain ! Before you lie the fields of Plassey
where Clive's sword was dyed red with Bengali blood.
In yonder Ganga, alas, India's sun has set :
that sun will rise again crimsoned with our blood !

Those who on the gallows' floor
sang the song of triumph of life
are here unseen and stand by.
What sacrifice will you make unto them ?
The test today is, whom shall you deliver—
the nation, or a community ?
The boat lurches, the ocean swells—
Helmsman, beware !

OF EQUALITY

Of equality I sing :
where all barriers and differences
between man and man have vanished,
where Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians
have mingled together. Of equality I sing.
What are you—a Parsi, a Jain, a Jew ?

Or a Santal, Bhil or Garo ?

A Confucian or a follower of Charvak the atheist ?

Go on, say more.

Yet, friends, be whatever you may please,
whatever books and manuscripts you may carry
in your insides or on your backs or shoulders—
be it the Quran, the Puranas, the Vedas, Vedanta,
the Bible, Tripitaka, Zendavesta, Granthsahib—
and whatever you may read of these as you please,
yet why this vain labour,

this driving of an auger into your brain ?

Why this haggling as in a shop ?—

Fresh flowers are blooming along the way !

Within you are all the books, the wisdom of all ages
and you need only to open wide your soul
to find all the scriptures there.

In you are all religions, all the prophets of ages ;
your heart is the universal temple of all the gods of
men.

What makes you, man of religion,
seek God in the dead bones of treatises ?

He smiles in the silent privacy of your immortal heart.

This is no lie I speak, my friend—it is here
that all royal crowns lay themselves prostrate.

It is the heart that is the sacred seat of Jagannath,
is Banaras, Mathura, Brindaban, Bodh Gaya,
Jerusalem, Medina and the shrine of the Kaaba.

The heart is the mosque, the temple and the church ;
it is here that Jesus and Moses discovered Truth.

The heart is the battlefield
where Krishna sang the great Gita,

it is the field where the shepherd magi made friends
with God.

This heart is the cave of meditation
where Buddha heard the call of humanity's deep
distress

and renounced his throne.

In this retreat the darling son of Araby heard the great
call ;

it's here that he sang the song divine that is the Quran.
I haven't heard it wrong, friend—
there's no temple or Kaaba greater than this heart of
man.

Of equality I sing.

There is nothing greater nor nobler than man !
No distinction of time, place or circumstance—
indivisible is the community of man in religion,
for in all times and climes and in every home
God is everyman's kith and kin.

.... .

The hypocrites worship the scriptures. Listen, you
fools,

it is men that have produced scriptures
and not scriptures that have produced men !
Adam, David, Jesus, Moses, Abraham, Mohammed,
Krishna, Buddha, Nanak, Kabir are
the priceless heritage of the world ; they are
our great ancestors, and their blood
courses more or less in every vein
of these our bodies ! We are their own offspring,

and have shape the same as theirs—
and who knows but we may grow
to their stature some time or other ?
Laugh not, friend ! This self of mine
is so fathomless and infinite that I don't know
what highest of the high indwells in me.

THREE SONGS

I

Why sit alone and in a vacant mood, fair maid ?
Go out to draw your water in pots.
'Come to the water,' cry the woods in plaintive song,
the river whispers in the murmur of its ripples.
Flies the day in the fleeting wings of swans,
the she-bird nestles in the he-bird's breast,
the swallow bids his mate a tearful adieu,
the flute pipes on the haunting Barwa tune.
The dusk beholds her face in the moon's looking-glass,
parting her hair to build the milky way,
the shadows in the woods prance like a dancing girl
to the swaying movement of her locks of creepers'
arms.
'The day is passing, O bride,' calls sister-in-law,
'Come on, if you would draw the water !'

The distant river darkens in its flow,
the town decks itself gaily as a courtesan.
The boatman ties up at the bathing place,
the wanderer walks o'er deserted fields—
whose thought makes your whole day pass in tears ?
—Fill your pitcher with the flow from your own eyes !
O heartless one, who is she that entwines herself
like a garland round your rose-pink feet ?
The poet, with you, is in a fix : shall we just
let her be there or lift her on the neck ?

II

Friend, please tell my beloved in confidence,
when you meet him in the orchard of flowers,
that the gardener has discovered who steals
the blossoms and defiles them at midnight.
The gardener has found out, secretly.
Explain to him that the path is thick with thorny
weeds,
let these not prick and catch his trailing scarf.
He must not come for this wild flower, treading on
thorns,
I shall myself walk to the bower of my beloved
and sell myself for no price at his feet !
Do whisper this, friend, to my beloved.

III

To whom may I confide what pain makes my heart
weep ?
Ever and anon this timorous heart keeps quaking.

He is high in the blue sky and I lie in mine sea of
tears,
and he goes round and round, chained to seven and
twenty star-mistresses,
how can I grab that moon since I am not the Dragon's
Head !

I fix him as the kohl on my eyelids
and out he goes, washed by the secret tears in dream !
I hold him to my bosom as a garland and it's stolen,
I tie him to my bracelet and he is wafted by the
breeze—

Oh, how can I charm the heart of that unconcerned
one ?

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